THE CITY OF SUNSHINE

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THE CITY OF SUNSHINE

A NOVEL

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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THE CITY OF SUNSHINE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RADHA'S CHAMBER.

No profane foot of man, save of him only who is the happy possessor of the beauties there immured, may penetrate into the *zenana,* or female apartments, of a good Bengalee family. The *pardah,** however, is not to be a barrier to us; and so we may just venture to slip in behind it once in a way, and even to tell what we see there: in strict confidence between ourselves and our readers, however, for it is ticklish ground upon which we are now treading. A respectable Hindoo father like Kristo Baboo would feel sadly humiliated if he were to learn that we had betrayed secrets of his to the public; but Kristo reads no English, and as Dhupnagar is one of the very few towns to which this veracious

* The *pardah* is the curtain or veil—existing often only in the imagination—that separates the women's rooms from the rest of the house.

narrative is not likely to reach, we may hope that this chapter will cause the worthy man no annoyance. Besides, Kristo Baboo's opinions upon Hindoo social questions have undergone a material alteration of late; but with that, in the meantime, we have nothing to do.

Let us peep softly into Radha's chamber. It is a long rectangular room, through the windows of which we catch a glimpse of the broad Gungaputra gliding swiftly through the green valley, and of the woody peaks of Panch Pahar standing up against the horizon. More care has been bestowed upon the decoration of Radha's rooms than upon any other part of the house. Gaudy festoons of green and yellow flowers are painted upon the borders of the whitewashed walls, which are further ornamented by a number of cheap looking-glasses of various shapes and sizes set in dingy gilt frames, and by a few French prints, as to taste as well as to delicacy questionable. These works of art were the *souvenir* of one of Kristo's visits to the capital, and a source of much pride and admiration to the household. A rich Persian carpet, purchased in the days of Kristo's prosperity, was spread on the centre of the floor; but its pile was now frayed and threadbare; its dark-red roses changed to irregular spots of brick-coloured worsted, and its glossy black woof to a dismal grey. There was neither chair nor table in the room, but a low ottoman stood against one of the walls, and a number of soft cushions were strewed about the floor. Beyond, a small closet was screened

off by a green curtain, and this was the maiden's bed-chamber, whither we are not privileged to carry our researches.

In the centre of the floor stands a tall lamp, and beneath its soft rays a fair face is turned listlessly upwards, a fair form is carelessly stretched at full length upon the soft velvet cushions. Extending for a good yard behind the maiden's head lie her rich tresses, which the careful Sukheena has combed out to their full length—a mass of silky, glossy hair, brown rather than black, with a wavy curl running through it, like the ripple made on a smooth brook by the light winds of summer. Radha's face was fair—fair even as may have been the countenances of her Aryan ancestors before the fierce sun of the tropics bronzed their hue; her features were regular and delicate as those of a statue; her brow high, and receding as it rose; her head round and small almost to a fault—if fault could be found with symmetry so exquisite. No European milliner had cramped the development of her lithe figure, or sharpened into angles the beautiful curves that set off her graceful form. As she reclines there, bathed in the soft light that falls from the lamp above her, her scanty drapery scarcely concealing the charms of her person, the shapeliness of her form is so perfect, her features so placid, that it is difficult to believe we are looking upon living flesh and blood, and not upon the marble creation of a master-sculptor. Radha is now seventeen, an age at which most of her

countrywomen are beginning to wear a matronly appearance, but time had as yet told upon the maiden only to her advantage, maturing the beauties of her face and imparting a voluptuous grace to her figure.

Sukheena, who is combing and braiding her hair, has been Radha's sole attendant from girlhood, and the two have grown up together in mutual confidence and love. Sukheena is a widow. Small-pox had carried away her husband when he was but a boy of nine, and before the little wife was old enough to realise the life of misery to which the loss condemned her. She was a year or two older than Radha, with bold, sharp features, to which the sense of widowhood had perhaps given a cast of sourness, and of a tall and somewhat spare figure. Sukheena's mother had been a poor kinswoman of Kristo Baboo, and glad enough to get her daughter taken off her hands to be maid to the rich man's daughter. Much as Radha was attached to Sukheena, the young widow's lot was not always to be envied, for her mistress's temper was not altogether free from caprice and imperiousness, to which a sense of her neglected condition had contributed no small amount of acerbity; and of these imperfections Sukheena had often to bear the brunt. But the attendant was quite conscious how dependent her mistress was upon her society and kind offices, for months would frequently pass without Radha seeing another person; and she returned anger for anger, and sulk for sulk. Quarrels took place daily, and reconciliations were as frequent.

Now Radha would break the peace and drive Sukheena into tears or rebellion; but she was always glad when an excuse for making up their difference presented itself. Then Sukheena would excite her mistress's wrath by venturing to censure her carriage and conversation, until a battle royal ensued, ending, of course, in the tears of the one and the soothing words and caresses of the other belligerent. Still Sukheena loved her mistress dearly; for whom else had the poor creature to bestow an affectionate thought upon? As she could never be remarried herself, she was thus free to devote all her attention to her mistress's love-affairs; so she kept a sharp watch upon every eligible young man in the valley, and made careful inquiries concerning his family and prospects, and the possibility of his becoming a suitor for Radha. So smart a person as Sukheena had not, of course, allowed Bejoy, the *ghatak*, to visit the house so often as he had been doing of late unnoticed; but that respectable practitioner had indignantly repelled all the handmaiden's attempts to insinuate herself into his confidence. The rest of the household, however, had a shrewd conjecture of Bejoy's errand, and by keeping both eyes and ears open, they had obtained a pretty accurate notion of what was going on between him and their master.

"And Sooroo heard the Baboo say, 'Give my best salaams to Ramanath, and say that good fortune comes with him whenever he enters our door; and that we shall gladly welcome him to-morrow night to make a

pakka (firm) contract. May our joint prosperity be thereby increased!'" the attendant is saying, as she holds up a heavy brown tress between her and the lamp, and places her cheek lovingly against the soft lock. "And the *ghatak* went away rubbing his hands, and looking as pleased as if his mother-in-law were dead; and he actually gave a four-anna piece to Tarini, the porter. Now we may be sure that something is going to happen when Bejoy fees a servant."

"How often have you come to me with stories like that, Sukheena?" replies the fair face, never moving a muscle, or betraying by a glance of the eye even, that Sukheena's intelligence was of vital interest. "But nothing ever has happened yet."

"Ay; but what was ever like this before?" argues the attendant. "Where could you have got so good a match as young Krishna, so rich and so good-looking, and so near your own age? The gods themselves must have been your *ghataks;* for if ever they made a match, this is one of their contriving."

"They have been in no hurry, then, about it, my sister," pout the red lips.

"Hush! take care how you speak of the gods!" cries the alarmed Sukheena; "and see that you offer a tray of sweetmeats this very night to the family idol, and pray that you may have twenty sons; for when you trouble the gods at all, it is of no use to do it for a trifle. It looks as you doubted their power when you seek something insignificant."

"As well ask them to make me a hideous old woman at once," says Radha, as she lowers her eyelids to steal a complacent glance along her own shapely figure. "Look at my play-fellow, poor little Tara. Is she any happier because she is married to Protap, the accountant, and has three sons? Her face is beginning to wrinkle already, although she is younger than me by the time from the Feast of Cakes to the Shyama holidays; and she has no more figure than a ball of worsted —she who used to think herself so slim and slender. Mother Ganga! I had rather live unmated all my life, than be turned into such an old hen as Tara. And if it were not that I do not like Radha Lahory not to be as other girls are, I should not weep though I were never married."

"Be the eye of evil far from us! Take care, Miss, that the gods do not take you at your word!" cries Sukheena, sharply. "It is barefaced blasphemy to speak that way of marriage. You let your tongue wag now when you think yourself sure of a mate, but only a little ago it was 'Heigh-ho for a husband!' But who knows what may happen? Your robe has not yet been pinned to Krishna Gossain's waist-cloth, and you may still rue that you did not make more of him when he was in your offer."

"Rue losing that unlucky boy, that eclipse-struck one, who goes maundering about like a crazy devotee!" exclaims Radha, with affected scorn. "Joy go with him! I never see him going about shaking his

wise head and muttering his verses, but I think of the Nawab of Panch Pahar's old elephant, with his big melancholy eyes always standing full of tears, and his trunk wiggle-waggling before him. I cannot understand why that silly little Chakwi does not manage such a husband. A babe might order him about."

"Say that twelve months after when you have tried him," sneers Sukheena; "many men are not so soft as they look, and many who bluster like lions in the bazaar are *chup* (silent) enough in the *zenana*. Old Jaggat, who used to be the Baboo's steward—in days when your father's steward had something better to do than to pay interest on mortgages—was always bullying and beating somebody; and yet his wife, a dot of a woman, as ugly as a she-monkey, used to beat him until his head was all over cuts and bruises. Who can say how man and wife will accord until the marriage is six months behind them? But Krishna Gossain is clever and learned, and can speak the tongue of the Sahibs—perhaps he knows medicine and magic—and he is, besides, rich and of a good caste; and so you may be very proud to have him for a husband at your age."

"Oh, ay," rejoins Radha, stifling a sigh in a yawn. "And the poor creature is madly in love with me too. How can a man so book-wise be so heart-foolish! He comes creeping about the house night after night, trying to peer into my window; and sighing until he is like to set all the leaves rustling about him. How

lucky for him that he does not fall in with the Muhammadan!"

"The Muhammadan must come no more," says Sukheena, with a positive shake of her head; "he has had only too much encouragement already. Why does Tarini, the porter, allow him to come so often? Blind as he is, he cannot miss seeing the man."

"Tarini knows better than to interfere with him," laughs the mistress; "the Muhammadan is not a Bengalee to be frightened by the shake of a cudgel. He would draw his sword and chop Tarini in pieces. I like to see a man with a sword by his side, instead of walking about with a staff in his hand like an old crone, as our Bengalees do. I saw the Muhammadan come down the road the other day with his sword clanking against the stones, and everybody ran out of his way as fast as if he had been a man-eating tiger. Would to the gods he had been a Hindoo!"

"He is not a Hindoo, but an unclean *mletcha* (barbarian)," snaps the maid; "and no modest woman would waste a thought upon him. What has a Brahmini maiden like you to do with a man who eats and drinks abominations, who kills cows and breaks idols? He carried off Belputtee, the ryot of Milkiganj's daughter."

"*Sri Narayan-ji!* I wish he would carry me off next," says Radha, between a sigh and a simper, partly no doubt wishing what she said, but speaking more to annoy Sukheena.

"What!" cried Sukheena, dropping the combs in horror; "can you speak such blasphemy and still live! Are these words becoming a high-caste damsel, O shameless one? A wanton tongue utters the thoughts of a wanton heart. But your father shall hear of this, lady; the Baboo shall know of your naughtiness."

"Shall he?" asks Radha, never losing her self-possession; "but who will tell him, Sukheena? Not you, I think, unless you were to forget what secrets I know of yours. I only wish you would tell him, for then I should get a new *dai* (maid), and a change would be pleasant, for one wearies of you always, my Sukheena."

This last remark, uttered in a calm, indifferent tone, completely upset the attendant's equanimity; and Sukheena, bursting into a flood of angry tears, began to passionately upbraid her mistress with ingratitude, with hard-heartedness, unkindness, and all uncharitableness. Yes, indeed, Radha had reason to be weary of Sukheena. Sukheena had never watched over her day and night since her childhood, had never nursed her in fever, or cooled water for her drinks in the long days of the hot weather. Sukheena was nobody—she was not wanted. *She* had not been more faithful and obedient to her mistress than a bought slave, and more loving and secret than a foster-mother. *She* had never borne scoldings and even beatings from the Baboo to save her mistress from an angry word. *She* had never allowed her own name to be made light of, that her

mistress might be sheltered from scandal. No, no, she had never done any of these things; and Sukheena laughed a bitter, hysterical laugh through her tears. Why not dismiss her at once? call for the porters and have her turned out of doors. She would be happier begging her dinner in the bazaar; yea, better lead dogs in a string than slave away all one's life, without even a kind word, for a slave's wages. Radha would have no difficulty in getting a better servant; some of the unclean Muhammadan women might be more to her liking; and the gods forbid that she should stand between her mistress and her pleasure!

Radha heard her with quiet scorn, and without moving a muscle of her beautiful face. "I thought it must rain after so much wind," said she, contemptuously. "You provoke me to give you *gali* (abuse), and then you cry like a neglected wife. You call yourself a loving and obedient servant, and yet speak of carrying tales to the Baboo out of the *zenana*. But I should have known better than to trust a person in your condition. They say a widow's tongue makes more mischief than a loose Brahmini bull, my Sukheena."

"Ay, taunt me with my misfortune now," sobbed Sukheena. "When did I ever breathe a word that you wished kept secret, mistress? Have I not lied, and plotted, and bribed, and sacrificed myself to screen you—done all for you that a mother could have done—and is this to be my reward? You have thrown dirt upon

my head: why should I live longer? Pray you, take a knife, and let out my life without more delay."

"Do it yourself, Sukheena—your wrist is much stronger than mine," returned Radha, with a placid smile; "besides, what should I do without you? for with all your faults I could get no one who would love me as well as you do."

"Ah, Radha, do you say so?" sobbed the melting Sukheena. "How could you cut my heart, then, with your hard words? You well know that I would not betray you for all the gold that is hidden beneath the springs of the Gungaputra. I can bear a blow from you, but you kill ten thousand with a word."

"Silly one," laughed Radha, "go on with my hair now. Of course I love you, and could not live without you; and when we go to that stupid Krishna's family, you shall be fed upon sweetmeats and lemonade, and shall rule the whole household for me—that black-feathered goose, Chakwi, and all——"

Sukheena leaped up from the task and threw herself upon Radha's bosom in an ecstasy of delight, imploring forgiveness for her late waywardness, and swearing to be her mistress's slave all her life long. "You will marry Krishna, then?" said she, looking down fondly into her mistress's eyes; "and you were only jesting when you spoke of the Muhammadan?"

"Of course I shall marry Krishna if my father bids me," replied Radha, dropping her careless manner and speaking in measured, dry tones. "I might never get

another chance of a husband; besides, the Gossains are people of as good a caste as we are ourselves, and so rich that they will not grudge spending plenty of money upon me. I care nothing for Krishna; he is a dumpish, woe-begone, book-Baboo, whose head is always taken up with some conceit or nonsense. What business has a man with books, unless he is a pundit like that ugly grey-headed Ubhoy, the Shash-tree, or an accountant like Protap, who beats his poor little wife Tara? I'd wager now that the Muhammadan can't read a word, and I like him all the better for that reason. Ah! as the Nawab of Panch Pahar's Persian wife, who came to see me last rains, said, 'He is *sikha murdana* (a true stamp of a man).'"

"Still the Muhammadan, and again the Muhammadan," said Sukheena, with a smile, and she shook a warning forefinger playfully at her mistress; "but you must give him no more encouragement, for if Krishna were to hear anything about him, it might cause him to draw back. There are always evil-doers about at night who have eyes to see what were better unseen; and if the Muhammadan were discovered about Kristo Baboo's *zenana*, the very dogs of Dhupnagar would bark the news up and down the valley."

"But, Sukheena," urged the mistress, "I wonder what the Muhammadan will say when he hears that Krishna is going to marry me? If he be as madly in love with me as he seems, he will be in a pitiful case. Suppose now—ah yes, suppose you were to fall in

with him, by chance, you know, and tell him about it—just to see how he takes it,—you understand?"

"Certainly I shall," replied Sukheena, who delighted in an intrigue; "there can be no harm in that; and I can give him a hint at the same time not to come back again."

"Um! you had perhaps better say nothing about that; the Muhammadan might think you forward. Besides, they say a woman's prohibition is a man's invitation, and the Muhammadan might think that we wished him to come again. I should like to see how disconsolate he looks after hearing the news. You could not contrive that he should be before my window to-morrow night, could you, Sukheena, without letting him know that I expect him?"

"Well, perhaps I may," rejoined Sukheena; "but you must not speak to him or take any notice of his presence. It would be most unlucky to let the gossips get your name in their filthy mouths just now. You must keep me with you so long as the Muhammadan is there."

"A salaam for your good advice, my Sukheena," said Radha, haughtily—"as if Kristo Baboo's daughter would disgrace herself for an out-caste! No, no; I may enjoy the Muhammadan's chagrin, but he shall never know from me by word or sign that Radha Lahory allowed his image to enter her heart. And now that you have finished my hair, I shall go to bed; and you may come and sit by me, Sukheena, and we shall talk over this famous marriage until I fall asleep."

Gathering her light robe about her with one hand, while she playfully pushed Sukheena forward with the other, Radha stepped into the inner chamber, lithe and graceful as a wood-nymph, and a queen in every step and gesture. And we hear the two talking far into the night of the coming marriage, and the feasting, and the grand procession, the elephants, the jewels, the presents; what this one would say and that one would do; how all the unmarried girls would envy Radha her splendid wedding; what fine clothes they would wear and how sumptuously they would fare once they had got into the family of the rich Gossains; how they would order Krishna's house for him, and keep both the fat sleepy Thakoorani and the foolish Chakwi in a state of proper subjection. And when Sukheena has petted and coaxed the beauty into dreams of coming happiness, the poor creature will retire to the furthest corner of the apartment and coil herself up upon the floor with a footstool for her pillow. We hear all their talk, I say; but I think you will agree with me that it would be inexpedient for us to carry our observations further than the green baize curtain which serves as a door for the maiden's bedchamber; and indeed, between ourselves, I think we have tarried quite long enough in so delicate a vicinity.

Next day, after her morning duties had been performed, Sukheena obtained permission to go and bathe in the Gungaputra. Sunrise is the hour which pious Hindoos generally select for their ablutions; but the widow

knew by experience that the sun would be in mid-heaven before young Afzul Khan stirred from his couch. Drawing a fold of her robe over her face, the widow took up a pitcher, and balancing it upon her head, walked down the road with the light, but firm and graceful, gait of a Bengalee woman. As a widow, Sukheena wore no jewels, and her robe was plain and borderless; but the arrangement of her dress was such as to leave no one in doubt that a coquettish spirit had survived all her disappointments. Her *sarree* was tucked up so as to show considerably more of leg and ankle than Hindoo propriety, liberal as it is upon such points, could have well approved of: by tight girding at the waist her bust was thrown into greater relief than was either necessary or prudent; and the cover on her face presented no obstacle beyond which an inquisitive eye could not penetrate. The village wives saluted Sukheena, for she was a kinswoman of the Lahories, and the confidant of Kristo Baboo's daughter, and the widow returned their greeting haughtily enough. Three or four young fellows coming up from the river winked at each other knowingly, and nudged with their elbows, as Sukheena passed them, prudishly moving her drapery under pretence of veiling herself more closely, but so as to afford them a full glimpse of her face. The gallants paused after she was past, and coughed and hemmed with rustic effrontery; but Sukheena swept on with a scornful toss of the head, which perilously endangered the equilibrium of her

pitcher; and the young men went on their way, pluming themselves upon their awful rakishness and dissolute conduct.

Before the gate of Walesbyganj, Afzul and Agha were loitering in the shade smoking, and endeavouring to master a programme of the Pultunpore races, which being printed in English conveyed to them little more information than could be extracted from the print of the high-mettled racer, executed in the usual extravagant style of Mofussil art, which graced the head of the handbill. Agha, with his usual cynicism, was expatiating upon English ignorance of horse-flesh, as evinced in the print before them—which, with its outspread legs and cocked tail, looked more like a representation of the holy beast Alborak that carried the Prophet to Paradise, than a thorough-bred Waler—when Afzul interrupted him with an impatient exclamation, and throwing away his cigar, advanced to the road.

"Oh, ay—of course, another woman," said Agha, pettishly; "run, in the name of the Prophet! You will never halt until you get a mischief among them some day. If you had seen half as much of women's ways as I have, you would keep as far away from them as from a cobra or a tigress. I don't know what like the houris in Paradise may be, but if they are aught like the houris here, it won't be much of a Paradise long. See there, how the wanton giggles and postures before him! I wish her ashes were in the Gungaputra, and her soul in Jehannum; and yet I don't wonder though

the jades run after him, for there isn't so handsome a lad along the whole course of the river. I'll go and see what the Subadar Sahib is growling about, and leave them to their own company."

"Soho, Lady Sukheena!" said Afzul, as recognising Radha's attendant he hastened to accost her; "what sins have you been committing over-night that you are hurrying so fast to the Gungaputra to get rid of them?"

"What am I, and what are my sins to such an unclean one as thee?" said Sukheena, shrugging her shoulders, and making as if she would pass him. "Stand aside, Sahib, and let me go; the road is wide enough to hold us both without any use for jostling each other."

"Nay, my fairy-faced one, thou Leila of the world, why should we stand and salaam to each other a mile apart, like the meeting of two *padshahs* (kings)?" said Afzul, barring the road with his outstretched arms, and taking hold of Sukheena. "Have you no token, no message from the pearl of Bengal, your incomparable mistress, whose beauty would have turned the heart of even Joseph of Canaan? Say, Sukheena, what command did she bid you bear to her slave?"

"My mistress has plenty slaves of her own race, willing to do her bidding, and needs not your services," said Sukheena, haughtily; "and Kristo Baboo has given orders that you are to be beaten with old slippers if ever you set a foot again inside his compound after nightfall."

"By the tomb of Pir Bahram of Burdwan, but there will soon be more slippers about the Baboo's compound than feet to put into them, if he or any of his slaves lifts as much as a little finger against Afzul, the son of Shamsuddeen. But see, my sweet Sukheena!" added he, taking a pair of earrings from his waistband; "look at these pretty trinkets which I won at dice from the Nawab of Panch Pahar; they would become your pretty ears! I know they would."

"I am a widow, and may not wear such ornaments," said Sukheena, casting, however, a longing look at the earrings; "but they are pretty jewels."

"And they are yours if you only do as I tell you; and when you come to my house with your mistress, you may wear as many jewels as the Great Begum of Delhi, and no Hindoo dog dare question you. We shall make you a good Mussulmani, Sukheena, and you shall marry one of the Faithful; for it is a shame to see a fine woman like you wasting her days in widowhood."

"Alas!" said Sukheena, "it is easy to talk; but the kite mates not with the crow. Who would marry a poor old woman like me?"

"Old! why, you are a good year younger than I am, and I should not mind a bit marrying you myself for a second wife, if Radha had no objection; and after we were married a little, it would not matter much whether she objected or not. Meanwhile, take these trinkets, and remember that your own interest is concerned in promoting this marriage."

"Well, then," said Sukheena, concealing the earrings in her bosom with evident satisfaction, "my mistress bids me tell you that you may see her once again at her window two nights hence when the moon is sinking above the minarets of Bhutpore; but on the pain of losing her favour you are not to attempt to speak to her, because she is going to be married in a few weeks to a young Hindoo Baboo of great wealth, and of the highest caste in Bengal."

"What do you say?" cried Afzul, starting back in alarm; "you are lying, Sukheena—you are a liar, like all your accursed race! Tell me that you said this to provoke me," he added, clutching her arm; "confess that it is all a *bannao* (make up) and jest, and I will forgive you."

"Mother Ganga be my witness, I speak the truth!" cried the frightened Sukheena; "release me, Sahib, for the pity of the gods! I hear voices coming up from the river. Just think what would be the consequence if we were seen together. *Sri Narayan-ji!* it is that babbling Gangooly, the headman!" she ejaculated, as she wrenched her arm out of the young man's grasp, and sped down the road towards the Gungaputra.

Afzul remained standing in the middle of the road in a state of stupefaction at the news which he had heard. If this was true, it might be the death-blow of all his hopes, and at any rate it would compel him to take instant steps to carry off the girl. Who could it be? Was it the young Rajah of Ghatghar, or Baboo

Preonath Dass, the Dipty? Whoever he was, he would do well not to cross Afzul's path.

The headman came up puffing with the heat, and oily after his forenoon bath. "Salutation, Sahib," quoth Gangooly, as he pulled up alongside of Afzul, glad of an excuse to stop and take breath, and never sorry to indulge in a word of gossip; "this is trying weather for a man like me that is both old and stout; but your worship knows little of either of these evils. These crops upon your slope are looking like withered jungle-grass; I really don't ever remember such drought at this time of year. I have heard my grandfather telling of a season when the whole country——"

"May Eblis choke your chattering! I would you were with your grandfather in the hottest corner of hell, and the north wind blowing the smoke and ashes in your face!" cried Afzul, as he at length became conscious of his interlocutor's presence. "Am I a Hindoo *bannya* (tradesman) that you thrust your bazaar gossip down my throat?" and the young man turned haughtily away and entered the house, thrusting Agha violently aside as he encountered the trooper in the doorway. Gangooly stood looking after him in amazement, for he had hitherto been one of the few Hindoos whom Afzul condescended to treat with politeness.

"Umph!" said the headman, mopping himself vigorously with the corner of his *chaddar* to conceal his confusion; "you won't want much hot seasoning to your rice about Walesbyganj, my friend, so long as your young

master is at home. He might have spoken more civilly had he been addressing a dog instead of the headman of Dhupnagar."

"So he might, Mr Headman," retorted Agha, contemptuously; "and if you had been a dog of a good strain and well broken, I have no doubt the young Sahib would have patted you on the head and said 'good Taabi;' but, on the whole, I don't think you have much to complain of. It was only yesterday that he kicked a fat, gouty mongrel cur of some breed of Hindoo pariahs fairly over the hedge yonder;" and the old Khyberee, delighted at having affronted the village archon, went away to the stables grinning with great glee at the success of his witticism.

Gangooly, indignant at such an insult, resumed his journey, boiling with rage, and perspiring with his hot climb. "The Muhammadan blackguards, the sons of impure mothers, the swine of the false Prophet, to call me—*me*, the headman of Dhupnagar—a dog to my face! May Shiva—but I needn't care; the law will soon avenge me upon that foul-mouthed fellow. I shall not be so uncivil as to remind him of his words when I take him up to Bhutpore prison with handcuffs on his wrists as a convicted *dakait* (robber); and that will be before long, or I am very much mistaken." And thus Afzul had raised up another enemy in the village.

The young Muhammadan kept a sharp watch at the gate of Walesbyganj for Sukheena's return from the river, but the widow came back accompanied by little

Tara, Protap the accountant's wife; and Afzul could do nothing but bestow an inward anathema upon both of them. "He will be lying on a bed of thorns," said Sukheena to herself as she cast a stealthy glance towards the Subadar's mansion, "until he finds out who is going to marry the mistress: but he may discover that for himself. How silly to think that he could mâte with a high-caste Brahmini maiden! Had it been a poor widow like me, without friends, and with no inducement to keep to her caste, he might have come more speed. Well, who knows where his love might light next, if Radha were out of the way? He said to-day that I was a year younger than he was, and that he would not mind marrying me. I wonder how one would feel, being a Mussulman's wife, and if it be *very* unpleasant to eat beef! Well, at any rate, he is the handsomest man in the valley, and it is impossible not to love him." But Sukheena said nothing of these thoughts when she told her mistress of the results of her mission.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WEDGE OF ACHAN.

THREE SHELLS' munificent gift to the temple was great news for the villagers. Prosunno, the lawyer, and Protap, the accountant, went about the bazaar proclaiming their patron's generosity, praising the beauty and value of the cup, and congratulating their townsmen upon having so pious and public-spirited a man among them. The chorus was loudly caught up by those who were in the mahajan's books, and those who wished to be there, so long as his two agents were present; but after their backs were turned, both Three Shells and his gift were freely criticised in terms that were the reverse of complimentary. Old Gangooly said he would believe the goblet to be gold when he saw it; but a gilt one from a miser like Three Shells would be more to the gods than a *rosha rooshi* (lavatory) of virgin gold from another man. Dwarkanath, the schoolmaster, who had just paid the annual interest on the mortgage of his cottage and homestead, and had

had an additional ten per cent added to the usance, opined that it was easy for Three Shells to show his religion at other people's expense: it was out of *their* pockets—it was at the cost of the poor Brahmins, and ryots, and tradesmen of Dhupnagar, that this vaunted present had been provided; and the gods, who saw what was behind as well as what was before, ought in justice to make recompense to the right quarter. Shama Churn, the grain-dealer, said it was not for the mouth to spit upon the hand that fed it; nevertheless, he, for one, could not believe that Three Shells' offering was due to purely pious motives. He was a double man, was the mahajan, and his schemes were not easy to understand; but of this they might rest assured, that Three Shells saw his way clearly to recoup himself before he laid out so much upon the worship of the Linga. Some hazarded the conjecture that the money-lender was seeking to ease his conscience for some secret crime that he had committed. Another that he was terrified, and very reasonably too, lest the Sonthal robbers, who were annoying the valley, should pay him a visit, and ease him of his wealth; while a third party, unwilling to commit themselves, shook their heads, and said significantly that they who lived longest would see most wonders. When the question had been argued in all its bearings, Gangooly thought fit to interpose his authority, and to solemnly caution the speakers against intermeddling with their neighbours' affairs, and forgetting the example which

he himself had set, to compare them to the sieve which blamed the needle for having a hole in it. At which signal the elders of Dhupnagar broke up their parliament upon the village green, and repaired to their own dwellings to discuss the eventful portent in the bosoms of their families.

It was not without considerable misgivings that the money-lender had adopted the idea of making a costly present to the temple. He knew that Ramanath would consider the golden vessel as a bribe to keep him silent; but what of that?—it was as a bribe that he intended it; and if once Ramanath accepted the offering, the priest's honour would be concerned in preserving the reputation of one who had been so great a benefactor to the shrine. But there were other considerations that entered into Three Shells' calculations. A scheming, unscrupulous mind like the mahajan's was little likely to brook the thought of being for life the slave of Ramanath's mouth. Three Shells was so merciless a master to his own bondsmen, that he had good cause to shrink from becoming subject to the will of another; and judging from himself he could not believe that any one possessed of power would refrain from stretching it to its utmost limits. Prosunno's information had, however, opened up a new way of escape. The packet which the priest had intrusted to Gangooly, the headman, contained, of course, the secret upon which Three Shells' liberty and even life depended; and if the packet were destroyed before any

one was the wiser for its contents, and the priest removed by any means, the money-lender might hold his head as high as the honestest man in all the Gungaputra district. Of honesty as a moral principle Three Shells had no conception: it was something that the law prescribed, just as it imposed a duty upon salt, or prohibited the illicit manufacture of opium; and a breach of the injunction was no sin so long as it was undetected. It must not, however, be supposed that Three Shells was an atheist. On the contrary, he believed devoutly in as many of the three millions of Hindoo gods as he was acquainted with; and he treated them exactly like a banking corporation, with whom he kept an account current, patronising the directors when he calculated upon a goodly deposit standing on the creditor side of the account, and humbling himself and cringing to the clerks even, when he had overdrawn his balance and wanted further accommodation. So Three Shells found himself busily plotting for obtaining possession of the packet, and for the removal—that is, murder—of the priest. The presentation of the golden goblet to Ramanath's shrine would help in a great measure to divert all suspicion from himself; and as for the means—ah, well, the means would just be adapted to such occasions as might offer, and Three Shells' past experience had provided him with a variety of resources. Of course, there was the danger of incurring Siva's anger by the murder of his priest to be taken into account; but the god, as Three Shells

tried hard to assure himself, could not with a very good grace lay a heavy hand upon one who had been so great a benefactor to his shrine. "It is not every day in this Black Age that the gods get a gift worth two thousand rupees; and Siva has so many priests, that he might be well content to let the half of them go at so much per head, and congratulate himself upon the bargain," said Three Shells to himself, in a tone of cheerful assurance. "The only danger now is that Ramanath many refuse to accept my gift, and then all my plans will be upset."

Ramanath, however, did no such thing. When Modhoo brought his master the news which he had heard in the bazaar of the grand present which Three Shell designed for the temple, the priest had been at no loss to conjecture the motive of the money-lender's piety. At first Ramanath had spurned at the notion of allowing such a wretch as he knew Three Shells to be, to become a benefactor to the temple; but in the present age, gifts like the mahajan's are not presented every day; and when once Ramanath began to consider the arguments in favour of accepting it, he was not long in finding out a number of reasons why Three Shells' donation should not be rejected. The present was a valuable one, and not to be scornfully thrust aside like a paltry hundred-rupee silver-gilt *lota* (cup); and perhaps—the gods grant it!—Three Shells might be penitent for his crimes; in which case, the gods forbid that he, Ramanath, should stand in the way of any

one making his peace with Heaven—especially by so costly an offering! And if he were to refuse, what excuse could Ramanath render the public? He was too soft-hearted to think of giving Three Shells up to justice, and without doing that he could not unmask him to the villagers. He was, moreover, a quiet-living man, and did not care about unnecessarily driving so desperate a character as Three Shells to extremity. But what mattered it though Three Shells was a miscreant? Had not reprobates as great as he possibly could be, purchased peace for themselves by propitiating the gods? There was Panchoo Bhur, the robber-leader in the last generation, whose gang had evaded the police for more than a score of years among the jungles of Panch Pahar, and who had committed murder, rapes, and robberies beyond numbering; and yet this same Panchoo had built a bathing-ghat, and a temple to the goddess Kali, upon the projecting rock which overhung the other bank of the river, and had been accounted a most pious and moral Hindoo ever after. And the priests of Jagannath at Padrepore had not scrupled to accept a golden arm for their idol from Bhima Sen, the headman of Bhutpore, although the fact of Bhima having strangled his mother-in-law was notorious all over the district; and, to be sure, such a present was a great windfall to the temple; and how the priests of these trumpery Lingas at Bhutpore and Gapshapganj would fume when they heard of it! When conscience takes a retainer, it is

wonderful how powerful a special pleader she becomes, and how many precedents in point she can patly produce.

So when Prosunno and Protap, the accountant, came to the temple as a deputation to present the cup in the name of Three Shells, the priest received the gift with grave civility, feasted the ambassadors, notwithstanding his antipathy to them both, sent back his thanks and the blessing of Siva, and commanded them to tell the donor that prayers for his prosperity and spiritual welfare would be said in the Dhupnagar temple so long as his gift was used in the worship of the idol. This was as much as Ramanath could conscientiously say, and less could not be said with civility; and as he took the cup, a piece of exquisitely-chased workmanship, admiringly in his hand, and placed it reverently before the Linga, the good priest uttered a fervent prayer that the gift might be accepted and the giver pardoned. It was a beautiful bauble, and Ramanath felt as much in love with it as a child is with a new and rare toy. In his delight he called Modhoo, and the other servants of the temple, and bade them admire Three Shells' present, pointing out with glee the reliefs representing the marriage of Siva and Parvati, in which the artist had done due justice as well to the grim deformities of the three-eyed and four-armed destroyer as to the lithe gracefulness and maidenly charms of the shrinking bride; telling them which was the meddling mother-in-law, which the

damsel's father, ancient Himalaya, and which young Kamdeo, the god of love, starting again into being after having been blasted by the wrath of Brahma. All re-echoed the priest's praises; but old Modhoo shook his head and said, "When the tiger goes to the Gungaputra, it is rather upon the chance of snapping up a bather than to worship the sacred stream;" until Ramanath felt himself called upon to reprimand the porter for his malapert remark.

Ramanath must needs also carry the cup to his house, so that the ladies of his family might be gratified by a sight of it; and as he walked across the compound, the priest could not help holding the vessel lovingly up between him and the declining sunbeams, which glinted and flashed about it, until the cup seemed to be encircled by a radiant glory such as that in which Hindoo art has enveloped the body of Agni, the god of fire. Simple Ramanath thought he could read the acceptance of the gift in the halo of light that played about the vessel as he held it aloft; but had he seen the malignant smile which was written upon a face peering steadily through the thorny bamboo hedge, he would have been less confident of the god's approbation. But it was only for a moment that Three Shells ventured to play the spy, and in another instant he had resumed his evening walk with downcast eyes and grave demeanour. Ah, Ramanath! could you have seen the goblet with the same eyes as Three Shells saw it, you would have dashed it to

the ground and prayed the gods to pardon your cupidity. But your death-warrant was written in gold, and the glitter of the yellow metal dazzled your eyes, as it has dazzled those of many a cleverer man, so that they could not trace the characters written thereon. Was the mighty Siva, then, talking or pursuing, or was he on a journey, or peradventure slept he, that he had thus turned his back upon his minister?

Ramanath's wife, the Thakoorani, admired the goblet as much as her apathetic nature was capable of admiring anything, and remarked how pretty it would be if filled with red and yellow English confections; and Chakwi, who could really feel a pleasure in such of the beautiful as came within her comprehension, screamed with delight, and childishly begged to be allowed to hold it in her own hands. And now the priest's happiness would be full could he extort some commendation of the present from his sceptical son; and at Chakwi's entreaty he bent his steps towards Krishna's room, the young girl following him in simple glee, as if unwilling to lose sight of the gay vase.

Krishna was seated at his table in moody abstraction, now scribbling a few sentences, and then tearing the paper into small shreds. A perplexing struggle was still going on in Krishna's mind. His love for Radha, and his disposition to make peace with his family, were waging a terrible fight against his religious convictions and his regard for honour and consistency. Sometimes the one side, sometimes the other,

prevailed; and for a brief space Krishna's resolution was, as he thought, decided, and his position firmly taken up; but the next gust of passion's suggestions, or the clear biting wind of conscientious conviction, swept away this resolution, as others had been swept away before, and he found himself again plunging blindly among the angry surges of contending feelings, striving vainly to catch a glimpse of the shore. At this very moment fancy was picturing to him the comfort and happiness which he might enjoy in his own home with Radha as his wife, and was rapidly wiping off all the outlines of the previous vision, in which he had figured as a glorious witness to the eternal truths of Theism, triumphing over the world's persecution and the world's scorn, and winning for himself a deathless name in the annals of his country. And certainly a lovely wife, and a pleasant house, with all the luxuries that an ample fortune could give, was a more agreeable ideal than to stand forth as a target for the brickbats of a mob of enraged Brahmins, or to sup upon a dish of prayers, with weary limbs and an empty stomach.

Ramanath had not as yet made any announcement to Krishna of the negotiations which had been opened up between himself and Kristo Baboo, thinking that his son was more likely to yield his assent to the marriage when all the preliminaries had been arranged, than if he were brought face to face with all the difficulties that might be thrown up by the other side. The priest was playing a bold game, for Krishna's refusal at the eleventh

hour might involve him in a serious controversy with the insulted Lahory; but Ramanath was a shrewd man where his own self-interest was concerned, and he knew the depth of his son's passion. He had hitherto carefully avoided Krishna's society, thinking artfully that solitude would be the most likely means of driving away those delusions with which the lad's head had been filled by his fellow-students. Krishna was all the more surprised at the present visit from his father, and his surprise was not unmixed with alarm when he saw the unlucky countenance of poor Chakwi peering timorously from behind the priest's back.

But the old priest gave his son no time to speculate. "Look here, son Krishna!" he cried in his loud, hearty tones; "see this vessel, and tell me how long it will be before your fine new-fangled religions will get you such gifts as this! You don't see many such ornaments as this in Keshub Baboo's *mandir* (temple) at Calcutta."

Krishna took the goblet, and cast a glance of admiration at the workmanship, holding up the cup so as to place the reliefs full in the light. "It is a very fine vase, and of English workmanship, as I can see. May I ask who is so rich as to present you with so costly a gift?"

"A poor man, Krishna, whom the gods have blessed or cursed with much substance, and who puts his money out to better than earthly interest by dedicating this cup to the service of the gods. It is Three Shells,

the money-lender, who has bestowed this gift upon our temple."

"A goodly gift, and a goodly giver," said Krishna, with a sneer; "I wonder how many poor men's lives ground out in satisfying his rapacious usury — how many widows' and orphans' substance, this cup stands for? A ryot selling his last waist-cloth to pay the mahajan's interest; a widow and her children turned out of house and home starving of hunger in the shelter of a ditch; a beggared *banya* (shopkeeper) driven to suicide by the money-lender's exactions, and a few other similar representations, would have formed more appropriate designs for the cup than the marriage of Siva and Parvati. You asked just now if there were such ornaments in Keshub Baboo's temple? God forbid! Better bare walls than that they should be beholden for decoration to those who grind the faces of the poor."

"But suppose Three Shells' money has not all been gotten very creditably," said Ramanath, somewhat disconcertedly, for the objections started by Krishna had previously been raised in his own mind; "are we to deny the poor man the means of easing his conscience by making restitution to the gods?"

"Was it the gods whom Three Shells had plundered?" demanded Krishna, quietly; "I thought it had been the poor traders and peasantry about Dhupnagar. If Siva and his fellows can delight in such a gift, they are art and part in Three Shells' villanies, and ought to be sent to the Andamans along with him. If

Three Shells be penitent, and anxious to make restitution, he need not have come to you. All his victims have not yet been driven to death, and he could have spent his money to better purpose in paying back the extortions which he has wrung from them."

"You hear, Chakwi, how bold a preacher your husband has become," said Ramanath, with a forced laugh; "but I warrant him a true Brahmin and a good Hindoo for all that. When you have given my dust to the holy waters of the Gungaputra, and taken my place in the temple, you will be proud enough of this fair goblet, Krishna; and I hope you will breathe a prayer for poor, sinful Three Shells, whenever you take it in hand; and really there is no one in Dhupnagar who stands more in need of a good man's prayers."

"I shall pray for Three Shells with all my heart," said Krishna; "but never, while God preserves my reason, shall I take that or any other cup in my hand to worship an idol."

"That is what they do in their Calcutta colleges," said the priest, making a desperate effort to be jocular, although his son's words made him sink at heart; "they stuff a lad so full of learning and conceits that he soon looks upon his own father and wife, and all his friends and neighbours, as little better than *mletchas* (heathen barbarians). But bless you, girl, it is talk, all talk! they don't mean a word of what they say. There is Krishna here, at this very moment, good lad though he be, and loving to his father, thinking how

cosy a life he will lead if once he had put his feet in the old priest's slippers. *He* follow their foreign religions and give up Hindooism ! I tell you, Chakwi, the scamp is thinking of marrying more wives."

Both Krishna and Chakwi started, and turned ashy pale ; the former, because the father's chance shaft had struck so close to the desire that lay next his heart— the latter, because she fancied the priest's words portended the fulfilment of her worst forebodings. The poor girl stole silently out of the room, and sought the solitude of her own chamber, that she might cry over her sorrow in quietness.

"There is no religion but has its faults and drawbacks," continued the priest ; "or if there were such a one, it would not be long in the hands of human beings before it became faulty enough. When God gives you a revelation, son Krishna, there will be good reason that you should follow it. Until then, be content with the faith of your fathers. As for reasoning about God without the assistance of a revelation, it is like trying to see without eyes. You remember the story about the three blind men who went to see the elephant, and how each of them described him when they came back again. The one who had handled the trunk, declared the animal to be like a huge writhing snake ; the other, who had felt a leg, pronounced the beast to be shaped like a tree, tall and upright ; while the third, who had touched only the body, asserted that the elephant was a huge mass of animated

matter, without limbs or head. Well, your Calcutta pundits seem to me to do very much the same thing when they begin to speculate about religion. Each grasps a small portion of the great truth that is limitless as nature itself, and he thinks that that is, and nothing else can be, the eternal *dharma* (religious truth). Our creed is broader, and has better interpreted to the finite human mind the manifold revelations of the Divine principle in the universe. But a simple old priest like me, who knows nothing of your college learning, cannot attempt to argue with such a pundit. I shall leave Chakwi with you to see if her mother wit can be more successful. Here! go and keep your husband company, girl! Why, she has gone off already. Well, well, son Krishna, I shall follow her, for good never came of wrangling; but if I am too old and stupid to reclaim you from heresy, I think I know of a pair of black eyes that will do more to dispel your doubts than all the logical darts of the pundits and their commentators." And bestowing a knowing wink upon his confused son, the priest left the room to carry his precious vessel back again to the shrine.

When his father left the room, Krishna sank back in his chair, and buried his face in his hands. He was then utterly powerless to struggle against the old faith. Whatever men might prate about free-will, fate had so far circumscribed his volition, that his will could never be carried into effect. Who was he that he should presume to struggle against destiny? Had

not every circumstance that had befallen him since his rash professisn of Theism pointed out clearly that he had made a mistake? The hand of Providence seemed, he assured himself, to be leading him back to Hindooism and to caste; and it was useless, if not impious, to harden his heart against the decrees of the Supreme. The prospect of a union with Kristo Baboo's daughter, to which his father had clearly enough alluded, was too much for Krishna's convictions; but he would not confess this even to himself, and sought rather by casuistry to make out a case for the approbation of his own conscience. This was not very difficult to do, when a dread of the enmity of the Calcutta Theists, and of public ridicule, was the chief argument that he had to overcome. Intellectual Belief had ridden a course with Love, and had been driven headlong from his seat at the first thrust from the spear of his gentle adversary.

CHAPTER XX.

MR ROMESH CHUNDER ROY.

One evening about sunset, the villagers of Dhupnagar were aroused by the unwonted sight of a palanquin coming down the road from the Pagoda Tope. Now as there were only two palkies in the village, those of the priest and Kristo Baboo, and both of these were known to be at home, everybody was agog with curiosity as to the new-comer and his business. They could tell, from the measured, monotonous chant by which the bearers timed their pace, that the men were no Bengalees, but some of the thousands of Ooriya bearers, who ply their calling in the streets of Calcutta. The sun had gone down behind Panch Pahar, and twilight had risen duskily up from the bottom of the valley, and was gliding with stealthy steps up the slope, while the last beams of sunlight that played about the heights melted away into a dim grey. Lights were beginning to twinkle in the bazaar of Dhupnagar, and the shopkeepers were taking their

wares inside, and preparing to shut up for the night. Those whose work was over, went and sat down by the edge of the tanks, and indulged in the gossip of the day, until it was time to go to bed. Wives were carrying home their pitchers, and the street resounded with the shouts of noisy children, as they chased each other up and down the dusky lanes, or played at *bhag bhandi* (caging the tiger) upon the open space of the village green. But old Ram Lall, having counted the day's profits with a discontented grumble, lighted two great lamps, and placed them well forward that all the street might see them, and some customer be attracted at the eleventh hour towards the shop. As the headman, Gangooly, came along the bazaar, he must, of course, have his joke against the old miser, and rebuke his extravagance in lighting up the street solely for the good of the public; to which Ram Lall made a curt enough reply, for was not his great son, the Dipty, Gangooly's master, who could degrade him from the headmanship if it seemed good to his honour? And Gangooly went on his way, well pleased with his wit, Lukshmun, one of the ancient and most quiet watchmen of the village, trotting breathlessly at his heels, until he came to the end of the village opposite Rutton Pal, the spirit-seller's, where a little group of the elders were assembled waiting to catch the earliest glimpse of the new arrival.

While they were standing there, Krishna, the priest's son, came walking past with a rapid step, and courte-

ously returning the headman's salute without stopping, he was soon lost in the darkness. The elders looked at one another doubtfully as the young man disappeared, and some of them gravely shook their heads as if they feared that Krishna was still in a bad way. Dwarkanath, the schoolmaster, nudged Shama Churn, the grain-dealer, by the elbow, and said, "See what comes of English education, my friend. He's gone out to the jungle to hold communion with devils and *rakkases* (ghouls), I warrant you; for those who go about in broad daylight are not fitting company for one who knows the foul sciences of the Feringhees." Shama Churn remarked that it did not look well when one was forced to shun the company of honest folk in such a fashion; and Nitye, the *kobiraj*, or doctor, had assured them that it was all owing to the unhappy young man having taken European medicine, which had, of course, utterly ruined his moral nature, and very probably his mental faculties also, as the drugs of European practitioners generally did. But Gangooly, who liked better to talk himself than to listen to others, authoritatively put an end to their scandal-mongering, and ordered them to find another subject of conversation.

"There is a curious echo in Dhupnagar when you mention the name of Gossain," said Gangooly, sagely shaking his head; "and what is whispered in the bazaar is sometimes shouted aloud in the temple. Krishna is a good youth, and a good Hindoo also, let

us hope; and when the worthy Ramanath goes home to the gods, I have no doubt he will make as good a priest as his father. Do you think that, if there were any doubts about the lad's orthodoxy, Kristo Baboo would have jumped so readily at Krishna's offer for his daughter?"

"He has accepted him, then?" "When does the marriage feast come off, Mr Headman? What dowry does Kristo give his daughter?—her mother's nose-ring and his blessing?" "What will Krishna Gossain do with his present wife?" "How many thousand rupees will the nuptials cost?" and a score of other questions were hurled in rapid succession at Gangooly's head. Forgetful of his own recent cautions, the headman drew himself up with importance, tightened his waist-cloth, and threw his *chaddar* over his left shoulder so as to leave his right arm free to emphasise his remark.

"There will be time enough for you, my friends, to talk of the marriage, when you hear that Kristo Baboo has called the betrothal dinner," said Gangooly, with an affectation of reserve. "It does not become me to proclaim by tom-tom any private matters that the worthy priest may have whispered into my ear; for he who betrays a secret is like a dog that bites the hand held out to feed him. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that this will be one of the greatest marriages that ever took place in Dhupnagar, for the Gossains and the Lahories have been the highest families in the

place since the days of the Nawab Shaista Khan, and the gods only know for how many generations before. And as ye are all persons of credit, and trustworthy, I may mention this much quietly among friends regarding the dowry, that—ahem—that it is none of our business, and the less said about it the better."

This was not the way in which the headman had originally intended to conclude his sentence; but while he was delivering himself with much pomp and emphasis, a pleasant odour of sandal-wood and attar of roses stole upon his nostril, and turning round he perceived that Bejoy, the *ghatak*, was standing by his elbow, his head meditatively leaned to the side, and smelling a bunch of flowers while he listened to the headman's harangue. Bejoy was not a man to be trifled with when marriage was in question, and Gangooly dropping his loud solemn drawl hurriedly brought his speech to a close, he hardly knew how.

"Salaam, *ghatakji*," said Gangooly, making a rush to change the subject, dreading that Bejoy might lessen his authority by rebuking him before the villagers for meddling in matters matrimonial. "We are going to have rain before long; the frogs have been croaking for it all the afternoon."

"We have much need for it," said Bejoy, looking up quite cheerily, and readily taking part in the conversation, when he saw that professional topics were put aside; "the cold-weather crops are in great want of moisture. But who is this approaching the village?—

some person from Calcutta, as I should judge by the tongue of the bearers."

"It is a lawyer coming to draw up the agreement of marriage between Krishna Chandra Gossain and the Baboo's daughter," suggested young Brijo, the schoolmaster's son; at which unseasonable observation Bejoy relapsed into his former pensive attitude, and the headman smartly scolded the youth for his unseasonable observation, and for his forwardness in the presence of his elders.

By this time the palanquin and its bearers had rounded the corner of the jungle, and were seen by the villagers approaching in a dark body. As they came in sight of the lights of Dhupnagar, the men quickened their chant and redoubled their speed, and in another instant they came trotting into the street, and set down their burden with a bump, and a grunt of relief such as only an Ooriya throat could emit, on the middle of the road right before Rutton Pal, the spirit-seller's. There were eight bearers, four to relieve the other four — squat, muscular fellows, with broader shoulders and harsher features than the natives of Bengal. They sat down instantly on the pavement, and one of them produced a lighted hookha, which was rapidly handed from mouth to mouth until all of them had smoked. Meanwhile the traveller inside the palkie began to stretch himself, and yawn, and to pull open the doors preparatory to getting out of the cage; and the townsmen stood by,

anxiously waiting to discover what manner of man the new-comer might be.

Forth from the palanquin crawled a man of middle stature, with skin blacker than the blackest native of Dhupnagar, but dressed foppishly after the manner of the Anglo-Indian dandies of Calcutta. An enormous *sola* or pith-hat, covered with yellow silk and resembling in shape a huge overgrown toadstool, was perched jauntily upon his crisp locks; his dress was a loose jacket of black paramatta, with a vest of the same material sufficiently low in the breast to show a dirty shirt-front garnished with gold studs, and a pair of stiffly-starched white trousers, which had apparently been just put on to enhance the solemnity of the wearer's entrance into Dhupnagar. His feet were encased in natty little boots of shining patent leather, and he wore a necktie of the most gorgeous colours. Rings, pins, watch-chains, and charms, with precious stones dug from the mines of Bristol, that Golconda of the West, adorned his elegant person in great profusion. In one hand he poised a gold-headed cane, while in the other he flourished a scented handkerchief of less than doubtful whiteness.

"'Thus far into the bowels of the land,' as the divine Shakespeare saith," soliloquised the stranger, addressing himself in the English tongue, as he stood up and looked about him; "but little bowels I shall find here, I warrant me: O *dura ilia*, the restraints that caste and superstition have cast upon a naturally

hospitable race! That's two puns, but it is too dark to take them down. Peace be with ye, friends," added he in Bengalee, turning towards the crowd of villagers.

"Upon you be peace," replied Gangooly, coming forward and salaaming, but sorely puzzled in his own mind as to what hybrid phenomenon this might be, wearing the dress of a foreigner yet having the features and tongue of the Bengalee.

"Are you the headman of this village?" demanded the hybrid, shaking out the perfume from his pocket-handkerchief as Gangooly thoughtlessly approached too closely to his delicate nostrils. The headman again salaamed and answered in the affirmative, adding, moreover, the information that his fathers had been headmen of Dhupnagar since the British had obtained the stewardship of Bengal, Behar, and Orissa. "And have you no hotels in this benighted and heaven-forsaken hamlet, my good friend?" said the stranger, whom we may without further reserve introduce to the reader as Mr R. C. Roy. "Is there any decent place where a gentleman can get a night's lodging?"

"I don't know, Baboo—that is, Sahib, I mean," said Gangooly, scratching his head. "Your honour sees that when respectable Hindoos come to Dhupnagar we are like to fight among ourselves for the pleasure of entertaining them; for verily, as holy writ sayeth, 'That man is truly excellent who offers to a guest a soft seat, clean water, and sweet words': and when a poor man

comes among us we all give him something to make up a meal, and quarter him with some one of his own condition ; for as the scriptures again say, 'Benevolence towards all living creatures—this is religion.' But in the case of—that is to say—in fact, your honour," stammered the headman, twirling his *chaddar* in perplexity, "strangers never do come here, and so we don't very well know what we would do with them. And is your honour a Hindoo ?" demanded Gangooly, dubiously, as he eyed the pantaloons and Bristol jewellery. "You will excuse our asking this, for we are simple people, and seldom see any one except our own folks."

"A Hindoo ! of course I am a Hindoo. Give me a light, some of ye," said Mr Roy, taking out his cigar-case ; but polite as Bengalees in general are, not a soul stirred to do the bidding of this man of doubtful caste. "There is not a better-born man in all your valley than I am," he continued, striking a light for himself on the side of a fusee-box.

"But are you a man of caste, Sahib ?" asked Gangooly, fidgeting about uneasily at the idea of being impertinent to one who might be a Rajah or a Deputy-magistrate, or some other great official of Government, but at the same time fearing lest he should compromise the caste of himself or his neighbours by giving hospitality to a pariah.

"Caste, indeed ! do I look like a man of caste ?" cried Mr Roy, indignantly. "Why, man, I was six years in England, and have eaten more beef in my time

than all the cows of Dhupnagar would make, if they were killed and hung up by the hind legs to-morrow."

Shama Churn, the grain-dealer, observed that it was getting late, and as he must be stirring betimes in the morning he would go home to his bed. "And I will go with you, neighbour," said Bejoy, the *ghatak*, shrugging his shoulders, as he took a parting glance at their perverted countryman. "Come home to bed, Brijo, child," cried Dwarkanath, the schoolmaster, catching hold of his son's arm, as that reckless young man was pressing forward to address the stranger; "good never comes of those who wander under the cover of night." "*Sri Krishnaji!*" cried Nitye, the quack doctor; "and old Biprodass, the money-changer, wanting his potion all this time! I am too long here;" and off he hurried as fast as his legs could carry him. And in the course of a few minutes the villagers had all dispersed with the exception of Gangooly, the headman, who still stood uneasily before the stranger, scratching his head, and twisting the corner of his upper garment in mute perplexity as to what he should do with this awkward arrival.

"Ay, there they go," said Mr Roy, bitterly, "scampering away as if I had brought the small-pox or cholera with me—me who sit with the Sahibs, and have dined with a Secretary of State. My dear friend, Lord Gotham, would not have allowed the best of them to black his boots, the d—d Bengalee niggers! Hark ye, Mr Mayor, or Mr Headman, or whatever you call

yourself, is there no place in this barbarous locality where I can get something to eat, and a *charpai* to lie down upon?"

"Well, there is Rutton Pal, the spirit-seller's, just behind you, Sahib, and provided you have money in your purse, Rutton will not trouble you about caste, and he will not venture to steal anything from a gentleman like you."

"A pretty-like pot-house," said Mr Roy, angrily. "Oh for the worst room in the worst inn of London! Good heavens! what would my dear friends, the Hon'ble Gupta Chatterjee of the High Court, or his learned brother, the Hon'ble Mr Justice Snapper, think if they saw R. C. Roy of the Outer Temple quartered in such a kennel? I shall have a fine tale to tell to my very good friend, the Governor-General Lord Sahib Bahadur, of the hospitality of Dhupnagar, the next time I have the pleasure of dining at his Excellency's table, Mr Headman."

The mention of these august names caused poor Gangooly's legs to shake underneath him. His first impulse was to humbly place his house and all that was within it, including his wife and daughters, at the illustrious stranger's disposal, and to run off and drown himself in the Gungaputra the next minute. His second thought was to mollify the stranger, and try whether flattery would not do something to soothe him.

"Ah, Sahib," he said, "we are poor ignorant folk, and the presence of a great man like your honour quite terri-

fies us. Your worship is so like an Englishman—in fact, may my offence be forgiven, I took your honour for one at first—that we should feel quite frightened to ask you into our poor houses. Yea, we should as soon think of daring to offer hospitality to Kumshuner Sahib Prowler, or Eversley, the Magistrate Sahib of the district, as of taking the liberty to invite your honour under our roofs. You saw how they all went away, abashed at the sight of your lordship's grand English manners. I hope your worship is not angry with me for mistaking you for an Englishman; but I say it with humble reverence, you are so like one, that Brihaspatti himself, the instructor of the gods, might well have made the error."

"Well, well, you are an honest fellow, headman, and can't help the rudeness of the villagers," said Mr Roy, quite cajoled by the headman's shrewd flattery. "But never mind; the rude Dhupnagar boor will regret some day that he shut the door against the houseless stranger. Do you know Mr Krishna Chandra Gossain, the idol priest's son, my worthy headman?"

"There he is, your honour, just passing," cried Gangooly, pointing out the figure of Krishna hurrying along the street; "the good youth is returning from his evening walk."

"Ha! that is fortunate," cried Mr Roy; "go, my good headman, and announce my arrival to the publican of Dhupnagar; tell him to have his best room swept and garnished for an honourable guest, and to

have a hot supper of the best viands he can procure ready by the time I come back;" and leaving the afflicted headman loath to undertake such a message, yet unwilling to disobey a person who assumed such airs of authority, the barrister rushed along the street after Krishna.

"Hi, Mr Gossain! Mr Gossain!" he shouted out in English as he pursued, "stop just half a minute, will you? The pleasure of five minutes' talk with you, Mr Gossain."

The sound of English words in the streets of Dhupnagar calling his own name made Krishna pause in amazement. He could hardly credit his ears, and felt inclined to think that his fancy must have played him false, but there was the speaker, running breathlessly after him through the darkness. Who could it be? Krishna's heart sank at the thought that some of his theistic Calcutta friends had come to intrude themselves upon his retirement, and perhaps to annoy him by their interference in his domestic concerns. It was with a sense of relief that he saw when the man came panting up that he had to deal with one who was an utter stranger.

"How do you do, my dear Mr Gossain?" cried Mr Roy; "believe me, I am delighted to make your acquaintance. Allow me to introduce myself—Mr R. C. Roy, of the Calcutta Bar, and your very humble servant."

Krishna had often heard of his adventurous country-

man, and he now shook him heartily by the hand, though he could not help casting a dubious glance upon Mr Roy's eccentric costume. The priest's son was not one of those who despised the homely habits of the Hindoo people. He loved his country with all the ardour of a youthful patriot, and though his mind had revolted against the national religion, he was strongly inclined to hold conservative opinions in other respects. The foppish Baboos about the Presidency who affected to despise everything that was not European and English, and who had laid aside the simple costume of their forefathers for a mongrel attire that was neither European nor Asiatic, had only impressed Krishna with their ridiculousness, and with contempt for them as jackdaws dressed in borrowed plumage. From what he had read in 'Champak Leaves' he had expected to find the grave and majestic demeanour of an ancient *Rishi* (Vedic sage), combined with the lofty port and chivalrous sentiments of a Bharata or a Rama, in the person of the author; but there was little in Mr Roy's appearance calculated to excite either respect or enthusiasm. And almost the first words that passed between them sufficed to create in Krishna's mind an aversion to his Anglicised countryman.

"My dear fellow, you can't think how glad I am to see you," cried Mr Roy, dancing a hornpipe round about Krishna, who looked with silent amazement at his singular proceedings. "What a comfort it is to hear civilised speech once more! I have had to talk so

much vile barbaric Bengalee this afternoon that my throat is as husky as if I had eaten sour mangoes."

"I am sorry to think, sir, that England should have made you dislike our mother tongue," answered Krishna, coldly. "I hope the time will never come when I shall feel ashamed of either Bengal or her language."

"All sentiment, my dear boy, I assure you," returned Mr Roy, shrugging his shoulders. "I once thought exactly as you do; but one learns better out in the world. You will get rid of these old-fashioned notions as you grow a little older. But, bless my soul! how can you, my dear Gossain, manage to subsist in a wretched little place like this, away from all the comforts of civilised society?"

"Dhupnagar is the prettiest village in all the valley of the Gungaputra," replied Krishna, who felt his anger rising at Mr Roy's contemptuous and patronising airs; "although I can well believe that it looks poorly enough in the eyes of one who has seen the great European cities. And as for society, I have my books and my thoughts, even if I were to set myself above the society of the kinsfolk and neighbours among whom I have been brought up."

"They!" cried Mr Roy, with a contemptuous sniff, "the *mutum ac turpe pecus*, the vile and dumb herd; what company can they be for a gentleman more than their own oxen? Why, my dear sir, we must get you

out of this valley before the white mould begins to grow over your mind by associating with these boors."

However much Krishna might feel contempt in his own mind for the grovelling condition of his townsfolk, he was not disposed to put up with such slights from a stranger, and he answered with some temper, "Every one has not had your advantages, you must remember, Mr Roy; and I, for my own part, wish for nothing better than to live and die in this valley and among its kindly inhabitants. But to change a subject which might breed discord, may I ask how it happens that you have chosen so late an hour for your visit to Dhupnagar?"

"Well, you see, I have come up from Calcutta expressly to see you," said Mr Roy, with hesitation, "and to talk about some matters in which we have a common interest as members of the same Society. But perhaps we had better *defer* it to a more favourable opportunity, in case we *differ* about that next, ha, ha! You see the play, and will excuse it. Punning is a poor gift of mine, and I cannot always keep the faculty in proper subjection."

"I am really at a loss to conjecture what you can have to say to me," said Krishna, colouring, and bracing himself up for the attack which he knew was coming, for he had instinctively guessed as soon as he heard Mr Roy's name, that the barrister had been sent to strengthen his allegiance to the Society. "I take a

great interest in the cause of the Brahmo Somaj, and would willingly do anything that lies in my limited power to help it. Will you kindly tell me, without further ceremony, what it is that you require?"

"Well, you see, my lord,—that is, my dear Gossain —I really beg your pardon, but my London career carried me so much among the nobility, that when I begin to speak English that phrase always unconsciously comes to my lips,—well, you see, the heads of the Society have heard something about a certain marriage, and thinking that you would be none the worse of having some good advice, they commissioned me to take a run up to Dhupnagar, and consult with you about it."

"Indeed?" said Krishna, "I am very much obliged to them for sending me so able a counsel; but I think they might have waited until there was some need for his services. But since you are here, will you be good enough to inform me who is going to be married, or what relation any such matter has to me?"

"Ah, if you take that line, it is my professional duty to tell you not to criminate yourself," returned Mr Roy knowingly; "but allow me to tell you that it is no secret in Calcutta that you are going to be married to the rich Baboo Lahory's daughter in this town, and the news has caused your friends very great concern, I assure you. Now, my dear Gossain, just think a bit before you throw yourself away upon a beautiful savage. Think what chances your accomplishments

and person, united with your pecuniary prospects, might secure for you in the polished society of the Presidency. There is Kali Baboo's charming widowed sister, who has been called the Sappho of Cossitollah in the 'Probakhur,' and who has written a delightful essay upon the 'Rights of the Bengal woman,' that was praised even in the 'Padrepore Monitor,'—a lively person, and so fat; it was no longer ago than the last Somaj meeting, that some one remarked that you were made for each other. Or there is Ram Charan Dutt's granddaughter. Have you seen the verses young Mohun Lall wrote about her in the 'Bengalee Baboo,' called the 'Heart-stealer of Baugh Bazaar?'"

"It is very kind of the Society to provide in this way for my domestic happiness; but, for my part, the Sappho of Cossitollah may throw herself off the Armenian Ghat, and she of Baugh Bazaar may break her own heart at her leisure. When I want a wife, I shall select one for myself, without troubling the Society about such a matter."

"But, my dear fellow, don't you see the scandal that you will bring upon the Society by marrying with a heathen woman according to heathen rites? Think how the 'Dharma Sabha'* will crow: how the 'Bengalee Baboo' will sneer at the Theists. I assure you, your apostasy would be one of the most serious

* *Dharma Sabha* is an association for the preservation of orthodox Hindooism, and serves to keep alive a reactionary spirit against the Brahmic Theists.

calamities that has befallen the cause of Theism for many years."

"You assure me of this, Mr Roy," said Krishna, as he felt his anger rising at the familiar manners of his interlocutor, "that you take a great deal more liberty with my private affairs than our very brief acquaintance can warrant, and I shall be obliged if you will allow me to bring this discussion to a close. I may, however, pass you my word that I have made no proposals of marriage to any one, and that it is very possible I may never do so. But should ever I take such a step, you may depend upon it, I shall not consult the Brahmo Somaj with regard to it, and that I shall vindicate in the fullest manner my freedom of personal action from the control of the Society."

"In that case I am non-suited," said Mr Roy, with a wave of his handkerchief, as if he were throwing up his brief. "Can you give a fellow a shake-down for a night? I am not at all particular, and the worst bedroom in your house will be better than that vile piggery where the headman was going to put me."

Krishna hesitated a minute. He was naturally both generous and hospitable, and would have gladly taken Mr Roy home with him; but what would his father think if such an open contemner of Hindooism and the Hindoos were brought under his roof? Moreover, now that he was beginning to get quietly reconciled to Hindoo society, intercourse with a man so notoriously out of caste would have raised the village again in arms

against him, and destroyed his prospects of a union with Kristo Baboo's daughter; and now that he had a fair ground for resenting the action of the Society, why should he condone their offence by offering friendly entertainment to their messenger? and adding to these considerations his dislike to Mr Roy, and his consciousness that he himself stood in the disadvantageous position of one who plays a double game, he came to the conclusion that it would be prudent to decline Mr Roy's society.

"I am very sorry," said he, "that the personal desire which I have for your society must yield to my father's scruples upon the subject of caste. If the house were mine I should at once bid you welcome to it; but I only live here upon sufferance myself, and I have more regard for one in your position than to take you to a house where you would not be freely welcomed. I shall be sincerely sorry if you have been put to any great inconvenience upon my account; but you must remember always that your journey was not undertaken at my solicitations."

"Certainly, certainly; no apologies," said Mr Roy, whose good-humour was impenetrable. "I quite understand and sympathise with your position. I daresay our friend the publican can get me a chop and a pint of Ind-Coope. I shall see you again, my dear Gossain, and we'll have another talk over your affairs."

"Really," interrupted Krishna, "my time is so much taken up that——"

"It doesn't matter," cried Mr Roy. "I'm not in any hurry; I want to ruralise a bit. A week, a fortnight, a month, is all one to me until you are at leisure. Believe me, I wish to improve our acquaintance. But as I see you are in a hurry, I shall just say *au revoir* in the meantime."

And bestowing an affectionate squeeze upon Krishna's hand, Mr R. C. Roy danced back through the street in the direction of Rutton Pall's, waving his gold-headed cane gaily about his head. "An obstinate young mule," he said to himself; "but, Lord bless you! he'll soon become as tractable as a *tat* (little pony) in my hands. These conceited young fellows who have been under the *patria potestas* all their lives are the most difficult to manage, and bumptious of mankind. It is only when a man goes out into the world that he sees how valuable a thing is good advice. But if I don't make a job of him, the next one need not try it."

"Insufferable, meddling, conceited fool," muttered Krishna to himself, as he hurried through the temple compound. "He reminds me for all the earth of the monkey that had seen the world in the English fable-book. Yet I ought to be thankful, after all, that the Society has sent me such an ass, for I might have had a difficult task to hold my ground against a wiser man. And that is what we make of ourselves by abandoning the ancient customs of our forefathers—a hissing and a reproach to our own people, and an object of contempt to our English masters."

CHAPTER XXI.

RAMANATH BREAKS GROUND.

"It is a disagreeable task, but the sooner it is got over the better," soliloquised Ramanath to himself, as he sat smoking in his favourite seat by the temple porch. "It is just like standing shivering by the river ghat on a cold morning, thinking how chill the water will be, and how one's teeth will chatter, and then after the first plunge finding one's self all of a glow. It had to be done sooner or later, and now the coming of this Calcutta crow that was with Krishna last night makes longer delay dangerous, for the silly lad is sure to get inveigled again in some of the springes of their thrice-accursed philosophy. If I had more sons, I would as soon wring their heads off as send them to an English college. What is the use of wasting time and puzzling brains in trying to know the unknowable? I had once a pedantic teacher who tried to make me believe that there was no such thing as the world; that it was all *maya*—a mere illusion—a shadow; and when

I retorted that it was very strange that *maya* should make one stumble and break one's shins, he broke his bamboo rod over my head on account of my contumacy, as he called it. Ram-Sita! *that* was not *maya*. What a trouble wives and children bring upon a man! and yet without them he lives only half a life. But much of this vexation about Krishna has been of my own making, for I was so proud of his cleverness that nothing would satisfy me but he must learn all the wisdom of the Sahibs. Of course I might have known that he must learn their evil ways also. When a king has a brave son, and puts him in the forefront of the battle to show off his gallantry, need he grumble at fate if the young man is slain. So I must just blame myself, and make the best of my blunder. It is very lucky that I should have such likely means at hand for putting matters to rights."

Ramanath relapsed into deep thought, and allowed his hookha to go out unnoticed. It was a lovely evening, and no place lovelier than the porch of the Linga's temple. The *peepul* tree was putting forth fresh leaflets in anticipation of spring, and a multitude of new suckers were struggling downwards to the ground, seemingly eager to close up the entrance to the temple altogether. The birds were flitting about among the boughs, or perching on one leg, with head turned reflectively to the side, lost, perhaps, in conjecturing what had befallen the priest that he gave them rice so seldom nowadays; while every now and then

some feathered adventurer would hop up the temple steps close to where Ramanath was sitting, piping out his evening greeting in the hope of attracting the attention of man. Until graver thoughts had preoccupied his mind, the birds had been the objects of Ramanath's daily care. When he came to the temple of a morning he was received with quite an ovation from the feathered choir, and the songsters would hardly restrain their impatience until he could empty his pockets of the crumbs and grains which he had laid aside for their breakfast, but would dart backwards and forwards about his head and shoulders, chirruping assurances of their regards and gratitude. The birds repaid Ramanath's kindness with their entire confidence, and they would come boldly forward and pick the crumbs from his hand, or jump upon his head with a burst of triumph at their own daring. But the first appearance of a stranger was the signal for a prompt retreat to their lurking-places about the eaves and roof of the temple. Sometimes Ramanath would remember his old friends, and then they were treated to such a repast as they knew not what to do with except to call in the birds from the trees in Kristo Baboo's compound, or from the bamboos in the neighbouring jungle, and to stand by pluming themselves upon their charity and benevolence, while their poor neighbours humbly picked up the leavings of their more opulent entertainers.

But neither singing nor fluttering could arrest Rama-

nath's attention that evening. He sat with his head bent forward upon his closed hand, gazing vacantly before him into the gathering darkness. The birds, with just perhaps an accent of angry expostulation in their notes, gave up petitioning as hopeless, and flew away to their roosts aloft. Modhoo, the porter, came with the flowers and the offerings for evening service, but the priest was unconscious of his presence. The old man looked sadly at his master as he passed inside, and set down the things in the antechamber. "A week of trouble is worse than a year of toil," said Modhoo to himself. "He has grown older in the last few months than in all the years that I have served him. A man must be far from well who sleeps in that way with his eyes open. I wish Master Krishna would let his father have his will, for his obstinacy will be the old man's death, and then the gods only know what will become of us all!" And he passed out from the temple again, coughing and brushing against the priest, but without succeeding in disturbing Ramanath from his reverie.

"Yes," said Ramanath, again shaping his thoughts into words, "if it were not for Chakwi the marriage would be a matter to make presents on. The Lahories are of excellent caste, and this girl is by all accounts of matchless beauty. And what though Kristo is as poor as a *fakir*, and as extravagant as a Moghal governor? Better spend his money freely among his kinsmen and townsfolk than scrape everything to-

gether to scatter among the pimps and brokers of Calcutta, as so many of our Hindoo landlords do nowadays. Of course we are paying a dear price to undertake the marriage expenses, when my son might take a dowried wife from the best families of Bengal. But the Gossains can pay for their whims without knowing themselves much the poorer; there are not many people in Dhupnagar that can guess the depth of old Ramanath's money-box. And costly as this marriage will be, I would pay the expenses twice over if it could be brought about without causing sorrow to my poor Chakwi; but that is impossible."

The priest once more sought consolation in his hookha, but finding that the ashes were quite cold, he recalled his senses and became aware that it was the hour of evening prayer. "I must set about it as soon as the service is done," he said; "and I don't know whether I wouldn't as readily leap off the pinnacle of Kali's pagoda into the pool beneath, as open my mouth to say a word about it to either of them. I have little mind for going about worship, and yet no one is in more need of the gods' assistance, if they would only give it to me."

Taking up the lamp and the offerings, Ramanath went into the inner chamber and began the ceremonies of worship. The faint glimmer of the cressets scarcely sufficed to dispel the darkness of the shrine. The black, dank idol was just discernible in the gloom

with a garland of yellow flowers hanging about it, which looked white and sickly under the ray of the lamp. From a niche beside the Linga came a yellowish glow as the light was reflected back from the polished surface of Three Shells' golden cup, which had been placed in this prominent position that other worshippers might be incited to similar good works. Ramanath felt a half shudder as he turned the lamp full upon it, for there was something in the yellow metal that seemed to mock him in his trouble and to tauntingly ask, "Am I not well worth the goodly price you paid for me—the honour of your idol and the reputation of your shrine?" and the three eyes of the grim Siva appeared to look from the bas-reliefs with a menacing scowl at his minister. Now that the novelty of Three Shells' gift was gone, Ramanath had begun to repent having ever accepted it; and every time he entered the temple, the sight of the vase suggested the thought that he had allowed himself to be bribed to secrecy. If the temptation were to be undergone a second time, the priest felt that he would refuse a gift offered by bloody hands, and warn the donor that the pardon of the gods was not to be purchased by silver or gold, but to be earned by prayer and practical benevolence. But Ramanath's wisdom had come after the event, and there was the ill-omened vase, casting the black Linga into the shade by its radiancy, and presaging no good to the priest and his family. When Ramanath shut his eyes and prostrated himself in prayer before

the Linga, he could not shut out the glittering gift from his inward sight.

When Ramanath entered his son's room he found Krishna engaged with an English book. Even in trouble and degradation the vanity of youth will discover something to feed upon; and Krishna now took delight in contrasting his present state of mental abasement with his former magnificent dreams of future greatness. He was reading the 'Samson Agonistes' of Milton, and drawing most probably in his mind comparisons between his own condition and that of the degraded Judge of Israel.

> "Ask for this great deliverer now and find him,
> Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves."

Seek for him that was to deliver his country from the yoke of superstition—him the great iconoclast, the illustrious reformer, the champion of Indian Theism, and of social freedom—and find him in Dhupnagar bound hard and fast in the chains of caste, and with his eyes blinded by the beams of passion. Poor fool! what was Samson to him or he to Samson? but if there was any consolation in the comparison, why grudge him it? When Perkins, who entered college with the full intention of being Senior Wrangler, was plucked in the "little go," did not he take a pride in contrasting what he had done with what he might have done, and in assuring himself that,

> "Since he miscalled the morning-star,
> Nor man nor fiend had fallen so far"?

And the reader may lay down the book, if he has not before this time perceived that human nature is radically the same, whether on the Ganges or on the Granta. Krishna closed the volume and started to his feet when he saw his father, and placing a chair for him, stood silently by waiting to hear what he had to say. The priest sat down, but fidgeted about uneasily, hardly knowing how to begin; and Krishna could see by his manner that he had something of importance to communicate.

"Well, Krishna," said Ramanath, "are you tired of playing the recluse yet? If you remain shut up here much longer, you will soon become as ignorant of what the world is like as was the sage Rishyaringa, who had been brought up in the wilderness until he came to the years of manhood. And talking of Rishyaringa reminds me of my errand to you. You remember how the ascetic was wiled back to society and to the court of King Dasaratha—I warrant me you could repeat every line of the passage in the poem as patly as I could say my morning's prayers. Well, we are going to try the same plan with you, and see if the smiles of beauty cannot bring you back to your religion and to caste."

"That is to say," said Krishna, bitterly, "you would have me barter my honour for a fair woman. What would you, father, say to any one that attempted to buy you from your faith? Surely you would not have your son do that which you would scorn to do yourself?"

Ramanath winced, and thought, as he remembered Three Shells' unlucky goblet, that if a paternal precedent could sway Krishna's resolution, it need not be wanting.

"No, my son," said the priest, "I would have you be a better man than your father has ever been, and I am quite sure that you will answer my expectations. You will be a great-hearted and true man, and the light of your mind will lead you through the world with unfaltering steps where I have had to grope my way. When you have erred, it has been through generosity, and because you hold purer and higher opinions than can be put in practice in this world. In learning, Krishna, I am to you but as an infant to a sage; but experience has given me many bitter lessons which I hope you will be spared."

Krishna made no reply, and the priest went on :—

"I know as well as you do that caste is an evil; but there are many evils in this world that we must be fain to put up with, and it always happens that some time or another we find them working good to us. And suppose we throw aside caste altogether; how long will it be, tell me, before the world creates another caste for itself? And which is the better—the Hindoo caste of blood and spirit, purified by ages of training and separation from the grosser herd of mortals, or the Christian caste of gold? There is old Heera Lall, the Brahmin peasant, who lives by the wayside as you go into Dhupnagar—the poor man has nothing but his six

hundred years' pedigree and his unsullied blood—but the proudest head in the valley is bent at his approach. Take away caste, and Heera Lall is but a poor cottager, with just enough of substance to keep soul and body together, whom no one will give a good-day to; and our salaams are kept for some churl like Three Shells, the money-lender, who has wrung a fortune out of the necessities of the poor, and made his way in the world by lying and cheating. That is Christian caste, is it not? For my part I prefer our own system."

"Nay," said Krishna, "you make a mistake. There is no such thing as caste among Christians. Money gives a man a position and influence in the world, but the rich enjoy no exclusive privileges which the poorest may not by industry and success attain to. The Christian creed, as well as the purer light of our Theism, teaches us to consider all men as our brothers, though by reason of the inequalities of life we cannot give practical effect to the theory."

"And we, though we don't believe in any such relationship, yet try to treat even the meanest as if he were our brother," retorted Ramanath. "You admit the theory, but hold its application as impracticable: we deny the theory, but yet practise it as much as lies in our power. I am a Brahmin, and of a race that sprang from Brahma's mouth; while the other castes were produced from the less nobler parts of his person. But there never yet was a pariah passed my doors with an empty stomach but who might have both food and

water for the asking. We can be as kindly in our way as the Christians or the Theists can, and with a good deal less fuss about it."

Krishna held his peace, but a somewhat contemptuous expression at his father's prejudiced reasoning could not be wholly suppressed, nor could it altogether escape the priest's attention.

"But why should we trouble our heads about the Christians? doubtless they are good enough people in their own way. We are Hindoos and Brahmins, who ought to be thankful for our high privileges, and to make the best use of them by doing good to those whom the gods have placed under us. And now let us to business. I did you a great wrong, Krishna, when I married you to our poor Chakwi; but I meant to act for the best. We cannot compel our likes and dislikes, and though I would give half a lakh of rupees that you could take her to your bosom and live happy with her, I am not going to make matters worse by seeking to force your inclinations. You love Kristo Baboo's daughter?"

Krishna knew quite well what was coming, but when the priest put the question point-blank to him, the blood rushed to his face, and he felt faint and dizzy. The crisis was come which must decide his future fate, and there was neither strength within nor assistance without to stablish him in his mind against the temptation. He took hold of a chair to support himself, and, looking guiltily at his father, answered—

"What avails my love now? I am married already, and may not marry again. You who have always condemned polygamy, would not have me practise it?"

"Ahem!" said Ramanath, calling to his aid a fictitious cough. "It is impossible to lay down a dogma upon a matter in which every one must suit his own convenience. If you love the maiden, there is no reason why you should not wed her; Chakwi cannot be more unhappy than she is at present, and it may well be that a second marriage, by leading you into domestic habits, will tend ultimately to her comfort. In fact, Kristo and I have talked over the matter, and there is nothing wanting now except your sanction to arrange the marriage ceremonies."

"And this marriage," said Krishna, in a hoarse voice, "would be conducted, I suppose, with all the old idolatrous mummery and idle pomp?"

"Well, you can hardly expect that Kristo would consent to a Gandharva* wedding," said Ramanath, forcing a laugh; "or that the fairest Brahmin maiden in the district would allow herself to be married as quietly as a *mallee's* (gardener's) daughter. Besides, when we are happy ourselves, we should make others happy too; and how are our friends and neighbours to enjoy themselves if there are not feasting and *tamasha* (display) in honour of the occasion?"

* A Gandharva marriage was simply solemnised by the consent of the parties, and without formalities, and was not held in much greater repute than a "Gretna Green" match or a "Scotch marriage" among ourselves.

"The short and the long of it is, father," said Krishna, "that I am to make my peace with Hindooism, and that my conformity to an orthodox marriage is to be accepted in lieu of a public recantation of my new creed. All figures of speech set aside, that is what you would have me do, is it not?"

"I would have you do what is best for your happiness, Krishna, my son," said the priest, stretching out his hand, and drawing the young man tenderly towards him. "If your love is set upon this maiden, marry her and be happy with her; but if you feel that happiness would be too dearly purchased at the price of your convictions, do what you feel to be right. I would rather lose my life than see you become a renegade from the faith of your forefathers; but were it to purchase my everlasting peace, and that of all my line who have gone before me, I would never ask you, my dearest son, to do what would dishonour you. I only bid you consider rightly what Theism gives you in return for that which you give up, and whether you can well be happy having made all your friends miserable."

There was a deep and dignified feeling in Ramanath's tones that quite got the better of the lingering shadows of resolution that still hovered about Krishna's heart. As the priest fondly caressed him, the young man threw himself into his father's arms, and implored his forgiveness for the sorrow he had caused him, begging him to do in the matter as he thought best.

"No, Krishna," said the priest, warmly pressing his

son to his bosom, "not what I think best, but what you would have me do. I have already given you my counsel, and I can do no more. I must not have my son reproach me that he married to please me at the sacrifice of his principles. You will answer plainly, ay or no, whether I am to make this marriage for you."

Poor Krishna had flattered himself that his consent to the union would be, as it were, wrung from him against his will, and that he could solace himself with the reflection that he had been coerced back into Hindooism by the paternal authority. But now, alas! the whole responsibility was thrown upon himself, and his father refused to give him any assistance in reaching the humiliating conclusion. "Do what you feel to be right," his father had said; and for a moment Krishna was tempted to spring to his feet and dash the temptation aside. But what good would it do? There would be all the old battle to fight over again—all the mental doubts to contend with, all the promptings of passion to withstand, and possibly yet more serious evils than he had ever met with to come, if he cast his lot unreservedly in with the Theistic party. He was already compromised with his Calcutta friends, and the breach would be more easily widened than repaired. But "yield" is an ungracious word for a proud young throat to utter, and Krishna felt as if he was parting with his manhood when he pressed his father's hand, and said—

"I can have no will but yours, dearest father, for

our two hearts are but one. I do love this maiden, and will marry her according to your wishes. I have given you much trouble, but I shall strive so that the rest of my life shall make you some amends."

Ramanath heaved a deep sigh, but strained his son to his heart. "The gods bless you, Krishna, in all fulness, and give you a son as dutiful and as loving as you have been to me! But be not rash—think well before you decide; it is easy to say 'bind,' but the tongues of a thousand cannot untie the knot. And remember, my son, above all things, that you are doing this of your own free will, and that neither restraint nor compulsion has been put upon you by me."

Was there no good angel then to whisper, "Courage," in Krishna's ear? His father's voice was gentle—nay, it seemed almost to be pleading with him to reconsider his intention, and his father's face was looking down upon him with an aspect of tender pity. Now or never was the time for him to play the man—to follow the dictates of conscience; and in another minute it would be too late. But the image of Radha came before him, and cast a spell over his resolution. He thought again: there was no constraint, no threat on the part of his father to justify his surrender, or to palliate his conduct to his own mind afterwards; he thought of this, but he thought also of Radha's rippling hair and faultless face and voluptuous figure, and steeled himself against the still, small voice.

"It is best that it should be so," he said in a low

voice, hiding his head upon his father's shoulder. "I have been wrong-headed and foolish, listening rather to the whisperings of my own vain thoughts than to the voice of reason; but in future I shall walk by your advice."

"Be it so, then," said the priest as he kissed his son, "and may it be a step that will bring happiness to us all. I cannot think that you have done wrong in remaining in the position where the gods had placed you; and if there is any reward for filial piety, you, my son, will be assuredly blessed. And now I may tell you what I could not have told you before your mind was made up. I love you dearly, as you know, and would willingly give you your freedom with my whole substance; but all our wealth has been made in connection with the shrine, and I feel that it belongs rather to the temple than to the family. So while it was still uncertain whether you were to follow the old faith, I made arrangements for conveying all my property to the service of the temple, reserving only such an allowance to you as would have afforded you a very frugal maintenance, and placed my instructions in the hands of a trusty townsman, who will not open them until I am no more. There is, thank the gods! no further use for them, for you will one day take my place in the shrine, and be a better priest than I have ever been; but we will let the paper remain, I think, that the townsmen of Dhupnagar may know some day that, though Ramanath Gossain loved his son, he loved

justice more. So long as you keep by the Hindoo faith, the paper will be utterly useless."

Krishna said nothing, but still hung upon his father's neck engrossed in bitter thoughts. Hardly had he passed his consent when he would have given the best year of his life to be able to recall it. The self-humiliation had been greater even than he anticipated. How could he ever bring himself to serve in the temple as priest, to prostitute himself by pretending to worship an idol? He had not thought of this before, and would he not be entitled to reconsider his decision in the light of additional information? But there was disinheritance waiting him if he revolted. If he did not know the one fact before he made up his mind, he did not know the other; and surely the weightier argument was in favour of the step he had taken; and above all was there not Radha, lovely as an Apsara from the heaven of Indra, chaste as Sita, the wife of Rama, whose virtue came out unscathed from the ordeal of fire, and loving as Damayanti, the wife of Nala, who clave to her husband when every one else in the wide world turned their backs upon him—ah, yes, surely her perfections would heal the wounds of self-respect, would deaden the pricks of conscience, and atone for all the opprobrium that he had already suffered and that still awaited him? No doubt of it; and he was a fool to allow himself to be tortured by silly fancies.

"And when do you propose that the marriage shall

take place?" he asked, faintly, with the vision of Radha still floating before him. He was anxious that every fetter should be fitted upon him at once, that he might be powerless to change his mind.

"That will be for Kristo to decide," replied his father; "but I am as anxious as you can be that no delay should take place. Vulgar tongues have already handled our names too freely; but this marriage will put them all to silence."

"I must make this stipulation," said Krishna, eagerly—"that I am to see Radha before anything is fixed, to learn from her own lips that she loves me, and consents to the marriage. Without this I shall take no other steps in the matter."

"Sri-Sivaji! more of his new-fangled English notions," muttered Ramanath to himself, adding aloud, "Well, I shall do my best to bring about a meeting between you; but you know such a thing is unusual, and Kristo may not care to have his daughter stared at as a filly that is going to be sold. You have had a quiet peep at her already, and might be content to leave all the other details of the business to Bejoy the *ghatak*. However, we'll see what can be done. And now I must go and break this matter to Chakwi, poor girl! and I would almost as soon go and put my hand into a caldron of boiling water."

Pressing his son again to his breast, Ramanath left the room. His plot had succeeded—succeeded beyond even his most sanguine expectations; but, with all

this success, was he satisfied? He tried hard to convince himself that he was; but there was a bitter mixture in his cup of joy. His son had recanted his errors, and come back to the old faith—back to Caste, and to the bosom of society. So far well; but where was that high principle that Ramanath feared to contend with, that fervid devotion for truth, that chivalrous hatred of error, which had seemed to him to animate his son's magnanimous mind? Had not the victory which he had been so eager to obtain been clouded by a feeling that his son had fallen in his estimation several degrees lower than before? Ramanath tried to think that this was not so, and attempted to dwell upon the sacrifice which Krishna had made to filial obedience; but still he was far from happy. "It matters not," he said to himself as old Dossee told him that Chakwi had retired to rest; "one such job is more than enough for one evening."

CHAPTER XXII.

WALESBYGANJ.

AGHA was sitting by the gate of Walesbyganj, sedulously polishing the barrel of an old Afghan pistol. It was a useless, clumsy weapon, with a trigger that could be moved only by the sheer strength of a couple of fingers, and a flint-lock that missed fire in eight out of every ten times it was employed. The pistol had long ceased to be dangerous, except to the person that was rash enough to use it; but Agha's original veneration for the piece had remained undiminished by his acquaintance with more recent inventions in the science of gunnery. With this pistol his father, Jabbar Khan of happy memory, had shot his hereditary foe Ahmad Khan of Jamrood, robbing him at the same time of a chain shirt of sword proof, only once broken, and a gold bracelet, well worth three hundred rupees of Company's currency—with a moiety of which money he had bought a blessing upon the weapon from the celebrated saint, Peer Muhammad of Jugdullack; so that when the

pistol came into Agha's hands, it was both an heirloom and a sacred relic. Worthless as it was for all practical purposes, it was of great mental assistance to the Khyberee. Whenever his ideas became confused, and there was a necessity for putting them in order, Agha would sit down with an oily rag in one hand and the pistol in the other, and rub assiduously at the barrel until his mind was clearly made up. It is not difficult to determine how the old pistol had come to serve Agha for a considering-cap. In the old campaigning days, when he had first joined Walesby's Horse, the ungainly, half-savage recruit had been the butt of his company, and the only relief that discipline permitted to his feelings was to furbish up his pistol, and dream of the terrible vengeance which he would take with it upon his tormentors when time and place presented a suitable occasion. And so much had habit become a second nature, that the trooper found the readiest mental relief in polishing his weapon whenever trouble or perplexity overtook him. Except himself, there was no other person visible about the premises. It was close upon noon, the quietest hour of the day at Walesbyganj. The Subadar had lain down in his garden arbour with little Peeroo "on duty" beside him, fanning the old man with a huge hand-punkah of palm-leaf, and whisking away the flies that sought to disturb his master's repose with a bunch of peacock's feathers. The *syces* (grooms) had finished their stable-work, and were gone to their huts to feed, or into the bazaar to

buy provisions. Afzul was not yet astir, and Leila's rough coat and muddy legs betrayed the fact that he had been abroad late on the previous night, and had come home by other ways than by the beaten road. It was not likely that he would leave his room for some time yet, and so Agha had taken advantage of the quietness to polish his pistol-barrel, and solve several doubts that were disquieting his mind.

It was no business of Agha's own that was disturbing him. The trooper never had any troubles himself, except what he underwent on Afzul's account. Most of his own wild oats had long since been sown, and many a stiff harvest had been garnered out of them; but when he did wrong nowadays he took care that his sin should be a safe one, and his conscience clear. But Afzul was a never-failing source of anxiety to both of the seniors, and to Agha more especially, because he was fully in the young man's confidence, and knew all his difficulties, while the Subadar was only consulted when matters had become too desperate for Agha's mending. And now he was puzzling his head as to what would be the issue of Afzul's intrigue with the Baboo's daughter, since the plot was further complicated by the intervention of a new rival in the person of Krishna, the priest's son. Agha had picked up the news that morning on his way through the bazaar to Rutton Pal, the spirit-seller's; and he was now taking the earliest opportunity of digesting the intelligence.

"May Allah make it clear!" said he, holding up the

pistol-barrel between him and the sun, as if his remark had reference to the weapon; "how should I be a reader of riddles? Why should a rough old trooper like me trouble myself with their *haram* intrigues and petticoat plotting? Am I, Agha the son of Jabbar, a man and a warrior, to become a *mu'tabar* (go-between) in my old age, a broker of Bengalee damsels? But then neither can I desert the *chokhra* (boy); if it were not for me he would ruin himself by some rashness in a fortnight's time. But how to advise him puzzles my poor head. Yes, the barrel is very dirty. There is this young son of the *Kafir* priest, a most likely match for the girl, and one that her father, the Baboo, will jump at as a dog will jump at a dish of butter. Then there is the maiden herself—will not she favour a man of her own people rather than an outsider with whom she could never honourably mate? I think it is most likely she would, for all that Master Afzul thinks of his scented locks and good luck among the frail ones. It is an awkward business, and I see no way of making anything out of it. Curse that barrel! will it never be clean?"

A few minutes' more of savage rubbing helped to arrange Agha's ideas, if not to brighten the pistol, and he again began—

"Not that Afzul's chances are a whit less than before, for he never had any. There was no way open to him but to carry her off, and another suitor more or less would make little difference. It is easy settling

these Bengalees. But if the girl herself take part with the Hindoo lover, it would be putting ropes round our own necks to carry her off. So it all depends upon the damsel herself; and we can do nothing till we learn her mind on the matter. Yes, it is clean enough for the meantime, and won't rust for some days at any rate."

And Agha, with a sigh of relief, dried the pistol with the sleeve of his coat, and squinted his eye along the barrel with a glance of satisfaction. He then levelled the piece at a *mina* chattering among the branches of a *nim* tree by the gate, and was going through all the pantomime of firing when Afzul made his appearance at the doorway.

The young Muhammadan's countenance too plainly betrayed that his pleasures of the previous evening had not been characterised by much sobriety. His eyes were hollow and bloodshot, his lips swollen and tremulous; and his hands shook while they attempted to roll up a cigar of tobacco, as if he had but partially recovered from a shock of paralysis. The old trooper marked these symptoms with an affected sneer which, however, hardly dissembled his real concern at Afzul's forlorn aspect.

"Up 'already!" jeered the trooper, as he carefully rolled up his favourite weapon in a piece of old oil-cloth; "are you really wise to venture out so early? Your eyes do not look this morning as if they would stand the unaccustomed sight of the sun."

"Witty fellow," retorted Afzul, shortly; "one would

think you had been brought up at Delhi as buffoon to the *padshah* (king). No wonder you ran away from the Khyber—you must have been much too sharp for the other thieves."

"Never so blunt as to go out o' nights to as little purpose as certain persons," growled Agha, who liked no jests but such as were of his own making. "When I put my foot in the stirrup after dusk, it was to make money, not to spend it."

"By Allah, you are right there!" said Afzul, with a deep sigh; "I wish I had broken Leila's legs—I wish I had broken my own neck—before I rode to Ghatghar last night. Send a *chokhra* (boy) to Rutton Pal's for liquor, in the name of the Prophet, for the very fires of Jehannum are blazing in my gullet this morning."

Agha rose and walked over to the stable, where he carefully put aside his pistol in an old teak-wood chest in which his little stock of valuables was locked up, and taking a glass bottle from a heap of straw in a corner, and a pitcher of water which was cooling in the sun with a wet cloth about it, he returned to his young master, who was standing with his hands clasped and his eyes fixed upon the ground, the very picture of dejection. Afzul seized the bottle greedily, and having taken several draughts of spirits and water alternately, he returned the bottle to Agha, with a sigh of relief.

"When I saw Leila's knees this morning, I knew you would be thirsty, and brought that back with me

from Rutton's," said Agha, in a kind tone, as he put the bottle to his mouth; "and now sit down and tell me what luck befell you last night, and then I may perchance give you some news of interest."

"What news?" asked Afzul, querulously. "Something evil, of course. A man is never smitten with leprosy but the itch comes after it."

"Nothing so pressing but that it will keep until your story is finished. So you have been losing money again?"

"How do you know that?" demanded Afzul, fiercely. "But you could have no trouble in guessing. Of course I lost money—I am always losing money; and last night I lost more money to that infidel hound of a Rajah than a year of my father's rental will pay. May Eblis choke me if I am not minded to shoot myself, and get rid of my troubles! for I can no more pay this money than I can fly from here to the top of Panch Pahar yonder."

"Bah!" said Agha, sneering again; "you haven't nerve to do it this morning. Go and play again; a few lucky throws will turn all your losses into gains. I thought there was no man in the valley who could play with your honour."

"I think the devil is in the dice," cried Afzul, in a fury. "Yes, by the Prophet! I believe that Shaitan himself was shaking my elbow, as he did to King Nala, in the Hindoo story-book, for the whole night long I never threw so much as a single *pasha*."

"People don't often throw *pashas* when they play with swindlers," remarked Agha, placidly.

"Swindlers!" echoed Afzul, indignantly. "Do *I* look like a fresh simpleton that sharpers could pluck? Why, the Rajah hardly knew how to play the game when we began. It is all my luck—my thrice-accursed evil fortune."

"The Rajah is to be pitied for his memory then. It was only the rains before last that he won ten thousand rupees from Captain Bonesby Sahib of the Junglywallah Cavalry; and I heard Havildar Runbeer Singh, of our regiment, tell your father the last time he was here, that the captain had made the stewards at Sonepore strike out all the Rajah's horses, and forbid him to come near the place while the race-meeting lasted. Was that like swindling?"

Afzul ground his teeth, and flung his arms wildly from him. "What a blinded *pagal* (fool) I have been! and yet I could have sworn that there was not a Hindoo in the Gungaputra valley that could have got the better of me at dice. And now I am utterly ruined; seven thousand rupees gone in a single night, besides what I owe to the Nawab of Panch Pahar and the old money-lender in Bhutpore. Wallah, that I were dead! for I can never confess my folly to my father."

"Nay, nay," said Agha, gently—"don't be so cast down, Afzul Baba; things will come straight somehow or other. You will be wiser in future, and the Rajah

can be put off with fair words, or the sight of a knife for that matter, until the debt can be discharged. A single gripe of the weasand would make his rickety highness hear reason."

"Nay, but," said Afzul, shaking his head sadly, "the Rajah has already parted with my notes. He gave them to a Calcutta *shroff* (banker), a lean, greedy-looking slave, who sat outside with the dogs and the menials all the time that we were feasting and playing. I repented as soon as I saw him pocket the paper, for these Calcutta *wallahs* (fellows) know how to make the law strong and swift against a man. But it is worst of all that I should be beggared at a time when I want money so urgently to aid me in carrying off the Hindoo girl."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Agha, relapsing into his usual sneering tones. "If you have nothing better than that to do with your money, your lamentation may be light. The Hindoo girl will soon give you your *jawab* (literally, answer—dismissal). She has got a likelier lover of her own creed. I wonder you haven't heard of the great marriage that is preparing for the beauty of Dhupnagar."

Afzul turned pale and gazed stupidly at the trooper. "What marriage?" he asked; "and whom do you call the beauty of Dhupnagar? Do you dare to say that any one has been rash enough to raise his eyes to the maiden upon whom I have set my heart?"

"There were a good many obstacles, they say, but

I did not hear that your passion had been numbered among them," returned Agha, as he folded his hands and half closed his eyes ; " but if you have any claims, you would do well to set them forth, for I hear that the marriage is to take place without delay. It will be one of the grandest——"

" And what is his ill-omened name that has dared to come between me and Kristo Baboo's daughter?" interrupted the young man, as he bit his lips and clenched his fists in a vain effort to check the rage that was boiling up within him. " By Allah, he will have to take my life first!"

" You are not in great peril, for your rival is not a very bloodthirsty - looking person. It is the idol priest's book - learned son that is going to marry the Lahory's daughter."

" That fellow—that bookish baboo—that miserable *keranni* (clerk) aspire to Radha!" cried Afzul, in a fury, pacing about wildly and gesticulating with his arms. " May the Prophet dig for him a pit in the day of torment deeper and hotter than the one set apart for all those of his accursed faith! I saw the slave loitering about the Lahory's house one night, and was half tempted to chastise him. Wallah, that I had done so then! But there is not a Hindoo in the Gungaputra valley that shall sit on the saddle before me. I swear by the tombs at Kerbela that I shall take the villain's life before four-and-twenty hours are over."

"Just as you please," returned Agha. "A Hindoo's life lies lightly upon a man's conscience. But it seems to my ignorance that the girl is rather to blame of the two. It is she that has played you false, and that ought to bear the punishment."

"Never! There is not a grain of falsehood in her whole nature. She is as chaste as the Virgin Mariyam, and as true as our Lady Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet—may peace rest on both him and her! She has been led astray by some of the accursed arts that the priest's son has learned in Calcutta. But were he as potent a magician as Suleiman, the son of Daoud, his spells will avail him little against my dagger. I tell you, Agha, that maiden loves me better than her own life."

Agha shut his eyes altogether and whistled.

"I'll see her to-night, though I should have to break into her father's house to get at her, and learn from her own mouth what truth there is in the story. But, oh, Agha! you must stand my friend with the Subadar about this money. You never failed me yet, and you will not turn your back upon me now. If I cannot meet these bills when they come from Calcutta, I shall leap over Kali Point as sure as the Prophet was sent by Allah."

"Well, Afzul Baba, I shall see what can be done. I must go and waken your father, and talk to him about the new *pottah* (lease) of Liakut Ali's holding; the man has been here four times asking for it. And

if I can put in a word about your affairs I'll do it. But the Subadar Sahib is very wroth with you at present. Somehow or other he has heard of your visits to Madam Diljan of Bhutpore, and he has sworn that the lady will in future have to lavish her caresses upon a penniless lover."

Afzul choked himself upon an oath, and snatching the spirit-bottle from Agha's hand took another great draught.

"There now, that will do for morning prayer," said Agha, regaining possession of the bottle; "you must go and bathe and get some breakfast in case the Subadar Sahib should summon you, as is not at all unlikely when he hears of the disgrace you have got into. Curse that pistol, it is as rusty as ever again!" the old man said to himself, as he trudged away to the stables to hide his bottle and prepare for an interview with his master.

Shamsuddeen Khan was still sleeping when his old orderly entered the arbour. The love for flowers which he had acquired among the imperial gardens of the up-country cities, was now almost the only solace of the Subadar's old age. Flowers never troubled him with misconduct, nor disappointed him unless when they faded before the proper time; flowers never appeared to feel that his presence was a restraint, or that his affectionate attentions were a tiresome embarrassment. Since his hopes of Afzul had been so bitterly disappointed, his whole life had become

wrapped up in his garden. The *mallees* (gardeners) were tasked with all the rigour of a martinet; the smallest neglect was punished with military discipline; the appearance of a single weed was as great a crime in the Subadar's eyes as sleeping on sentry had been in his younger days: and had the law allowed him, he would have visited the careless destruction of one of his favourite shrubs with the heaviest penalty provided in the Mutiny Act. The "black hole" at Walesbyganj was seldom without some of the gardeners or their apprentices; but as it was a cool room and pleasant to sleep in, they rather enjoyed the punishment than otherwise. The Subadar's servants were not long in discovering that their master's severity was purely theoretical, and that his punishments were terrible only in name; and they would generally have taken their own way about the place but for their dread of Agha. That his punishments were not nominal the Walesbyganj servants very soon discovered to their cost. If Shamsuddeen Khan was the *roi fainéant*, Agha was a most energetic mayor of the Walesbyganj palace.

The trooper stood for a minute looking into the cool shade, formed by creeping evergreens, trained to grow over the drooping bough of an acacia-tree, where his master was sleeping. The Subadar's head was thrown back upon a soft velvet cushion, his turban had fallen off, showing the few silver hairs that still lingered about his temple, and his long grey

beard flowed over his breast, rising and falling like a wave with the old man's regular breathing. His face was thin and careworn, and the skin hung loosely about his big wrist-bones. Agha thought sadly of the great strong officer of twenty years ago, whose right hand could rein in the most headstrong horse in the Irregular Cavalry, and who could cut a full-fed Patna sheep in two as easily as a Sindee juggler would split an apple. A child of twelve might now get the better of this feeble, shattered old man, and yet he had once ridden in the foremost ranks of battle. A twinge of compunction crossed Agha's conscience as he remembered that trouble more than age had wrought this wreck, and that he himself was not altogether innocent of disturbing his master's peace. And now he was about to inflict still greater vexation upon him. If it had not been for his recollection of Afzul's extremity, Agha felt that he could not have braced his nerves for the interview; and he turned his face away that the sight of his master's careworn countenance might not get the better of his resolution.

Peeroo, the Subadar's attendant, had brightened up at the sight of Agha; he was growing tired of fanning the old man, and naturally thought that Agha would waken him, and that he himself would be released. But when the trooper turned away, Peeroo's impatience got the better of him, and he desisted from his task. "*Punkah karo, chokhra*" (ply your fan, boy), cried the Subadar instinctively in his sleep, as he missed the

cooling motion; and Peeroo set to work again, flicking the Subadar's face with the feathers in his exasperation. "Eh! what! the gun gone already?" said the old man, sitting up alertly; "bid them sound for stable parade, Duffadar:" but as he rubbed his eyes and saw Agha standing before him, and Peeroo fanning him as if for life and death, he remembered where he was, and became once more the decrepit veteran.

"*Bas punkah*" (enough of the fan), said he, languidly; and with a low salaam the delighted Peeroo ran away. "Well, Agha," he continued, as the trooper came forward with a military salute, "what have you to report?"

Agha's only reply was a fictitious cough, as he stooped down to conceal his face and hook up the stem of a tall lily that had been broken down by some careless intruder. "Ah yes, that is right," said the old man with a pleased look. "I shall have to make you take some order with these careless gardeners, Agha. I would not for five rupees that yonder flower were destroyed. It came from the Government gardens at Pultunpore. Have you anything to say to me?"

"Liakut Ali has been here about his lease, Subadar Sahib," replied Agha; "he is getting old and frail, and wishes his lease transferred to Suraj, his eldest son. The young man is industrious and well-doing, and takes in hand to support the whole family."

"That is right, Agha; such a youth deserves to be encouraged. He shall have the lease again, at the old

rent too. Would there were more sons like him! And now tell me, what is the Child doing at present?"

But Agha did not seem to hear the question. He was stooping with his hands on his knees, looking intently at a bush of blood-red roses, the stems of which were bending low with the weight of the blossoms.

"These roses, Subadar Sahib, far surpass any that I have ever seen in Delhi," said Agha, in tones of admiration. "Oh father! but it is wonderful that they should grow so luxuriantly in so hot a place as this. It is your *ikbal* (good luck) that makes them bloom so well."

"Nay, nay, no *ikbal*, but good gardening," replied the Subadar, with a pleased smile; "but I am glad that you admire the flowers, for they are really fine. I have seen worse blossoms than these offered as a present to the old Emperor. But I was asking you about Afzul."

"Well, you see, the fact is, Subadar Sahib, that he has not been just so careful as he ought to have been. There are rascally sharpers about—that young Rajah down the river and the old Nawab of Panch Pahar have both cozened him at play, and he will have to pay smartly for his amusement. But you know one cannot be wise beforehand, and the Child will be all the steadier for a little lesson. We have recovered all the arrears upon the houses at Bhutpore this year, and you will never miss the money."

"Alas! Agha," said the Subadar, shaking his head, "it is not the money that vexes me. What use is money to me, except that I may save it for him when I am gone? But his conduct is bruising my heart. The Child is never content except when he is breaking the laws of God and man, ruining his own health, and bringing discredit upon the holy faith of Islam in the midst of this infidel population. You need not deny it. I can read in his face the life he leads without asking any questions. He has more wrinkles in his brow at twenty than I had at fifty, although I had gone through the Afghan war and the two campaigns in the Punjab, and undergone such hardships as soldiers little dream of nowadays. But I could always say my prayers with a cool head and a clear conscience, no matter how early the bugles sounded."

"Your mention of the Punjab war, Sahib, reminds me that I have to tell you of Jowahir Singh's death—you remember Jowahir, who was Duffadar in my old company?" said Agha, adroitly giving another turn to the conversation.

"Dead, is he? Jowahir Singh—ay, to be sure, I remember him well," said the old man, musingly; "I remember how cool he was, charging through the jungle upon the Sikh batteries at Chillianwallah. There was a tree hanging full of delicious *leechees* right before us, as we were pressing on under a deadly fire, 'Wuh!' said old Jowahir, 'I shall gather a *pagri* (turban) full for breakfast as I come back again;' and

he was as good as his word, though he had sabred five or six of the Sikh artillerymen between hands. Dead, is he?—peace be with him, though an infidel!—a cool old fellow was Jowahir Singh. His charger was a Cabulee with a white star on his breast—a horse that was stronger in the haunches than any in the regiment. Major Pegger Sahib offered twelve hundred rupees for him, to be a pig-sticker; but Jowahir would not sell him, though he said that he would not like any one to make him such an offer for his wife. And old Jowahir Singh is dead?"

"You remember, Subadar, what you said that day, when Colonel Snaffle Sahib's dragoons gave the word, 'Threes about'?" insinuated Agha. "You and some six of us, with little Cornet Canter Sahib, were surrounded by Sikh infantry, and you said to the Cornet if they had come as far as we have, they would not be in such a hurry to fall back. You recollect how you struck down that big Sirdar who attempted to cut off our retreat to the main body of the brigade?"

"Ah, well, I daresay," said the old officer, drawing himself up on his seat; "there is little merit in fighting well when the word is 'kill or be killed.' But there never was enemy yet, Sikh or Afghan, who could tell how the backs of Walesby's troopers' jackets were trimmed. Not even at Chillianwallah; for when we were ordered to retreat, we still had the most of the Sikhs before us."

Memory had made another man of the Subadar.

His eye had brightened, and his frame become erect and active; and as, aroused by his reminiscences of war, he started to his feet, and began to pace the garden with a firm step, Agha saw that his object had been achieved, and that he could bear the disagreeable news of his son's difficulties so long as the excitement lasted.

"I shall make arrangements then for paying the Child's debts?" said Agha, in a matter-of-course way, as if everything had been already settled; "there is money enough in my hands to clear him, and I shall get the accounts written out and bring them to you afterwards."

"I tell you, Agha, I am wearied out with the Child's evil courses," said the Subadar, angrily; "if he lose money, he must pay it out of his own purse. Am I to use the bounty of the British Government for the support of all the gamesters and courtesans in the valley? But I shall take another way with him and with you all. I shall keep regular discipline in future, and muster the household every night at ten, and then whoever is absent shall be so at his peril. What is the amount of the Child's debts?"

"Twelve thousand rupees would pay them all and be something over," said Agha, carelessly; "but there is no need for you to trouble yourself about it, Subadar Sahib; I have more than that of rents in my hand, and will settle the matter as soon as you give me permission to do so. I'll answer for it that the Child does

not squander more in the same way. Shall I pay the money?"

"Pay it! yes, pay it, in the Prophet's name, were it the last rupee that I am possessed of!" cried the Subadar, bitterly—"and never let it be said that a son of Islam broke his bond to the infidel. But listen, Agha —this must come to an end. If entreaties and kindly counsel will not avail with the Child, we must try another plan. You will keep him under surveillance, and report to me before he leaves the house upon any of his nefarious excursions."

But Agha had gained his object, and the necessity for being civil no longer existed. So he replied, roughly, "As well try to keep a *shaitan-i-khyal* (will-o'-the-wisp—*lit.* devil's delusion) under surveillance as the Child. Just try it yourself a fortnight and see what you think of it for a job."

"Peace," said the Subadar, sternly; "it is little wonder though the Child be disobedient and unsteady, considering the example you set him. But unless I speedily see signs of better conduct in you, you will have to go back to the frontier. My house is not to be a harbour for blusterers and profligates."

"I wait for my dismissal, Subadar Sahib," said Agha, with a sneer.

"And, by the Prophet, you shall have it, and that before long, too!" cried Shamsuddeen. "Are you, or am I, to be master in this house? Is there any reward to me, do you think, for having my life embittered by

an old cross-grained wolf of the Khyber like you? By Allah! I believe that the unfortunate child has not acquired a single vice, many of them as he has now, that he has not learned from your example."

"His father's son had no need of evil example," retorted Agha, "for breaking will never remove inbred faults."

"Silence, fellow! 'Tenshun!" thundered the Subadar, and Agha at once drew himself stiffly up in a military attitude. "Your words are insubordinate, and merit severe punishment. Now, listen: you will tell Afzul that this money will be paid because I do not want my name to be tainted with dishonour; but you will tell him at the same time that no more cash will be supplied him for the same base purposes. I owe all my prosperity to the English Government, and it is the duty of both me and my son to show our gratitude by observing its laws, and by becoming examples of loyalty and sobriety to the other subjects about us. You presume upon my weakness; but you shall find that I am strong enough to curb you all yet. If Afzul do not mend his ways, I shall leave my *jaghire* (rent-free estate) to my old comrade Feroze Shah and his children; and I will be doing the Child a greater kindness than if I provided him with the means of ruining himself, soul and body. You will tell him this, Agha, and you will tell yourself, moreover, that the next time you enter the shop of that vile spirit-seller at the other end of the village, you will find my doors close when

you return. Silence in the ranks!" he added, as Agha would have replied; "right about face! march!" and as the trooper strode away, without a word of remonstrance, the old man fell back upon his seat in the arbour, utterly exhausted with the effort which he had made to assert his lost authority.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARIAGE À LA MODE INDIENNE.

THE head of the house of Lahory was closeted with Bejoy, the *ghatak*, deep in the discussion of an alliance with Ramanath's family. Since he last visited Kristo, Bejoy's position had undergone a considerable change. *Then*, he had been employed upon a mere demi-official mission, as an unaccredited envoy who could claim little countenance for himself or for his business. *Now*, he was an ambassador plenipotentiary, empowered to make what conditions he pleased in the name of Ramanath, the priest, and in a position to grant such concessions as would place him on a high vantage-ground above the other negotiator. His present dignified character was fully reflected in Bejoy's demeanour. An expression of grave importance was firmly fitted on to the match-maker's face; his eyelids were lowered so that no twinkle of triumph or glimmer of disappointment might betray itself; and his thin lips

were closely pressed together and curled down towards the corners of his mouth, as if it required a serious effort to repress the weighty thoughts that were working within him. Always neat in his dress, Bejoy was on this occasion as dainty as a newly-gathered nosegay. His *chaddar* was so crisply starched that it rustled at the slightest movement; his garments showed a broad stripe of gold embroidery; and a number of valuable rings glittered on his little fat fingers. The man's appearance was essentially feminine, as indeed became his occupation; but there was a still determination of purpose, and a latent capacity for hatred and malignity, that would, when occasion required, show itself above the usual sleek placidity of his manner. If there were anything in metempsychosis, Bejoy could not have undergone many transmigrations since his soul had tabernacled in the form of a cat, for his expression was still much more feline than human. When he walked, it was with a stealthy, noiseless, cat-like tread; when he was pleased, his voice sounded like a gentle purring; when he meant business, he half closed his eyes and listlessly allowed the mouse to gambol about until the proper minute arrived for him to put out his paw; and as he sat face to face with Kristo on the present occasion, one could have almost sworn that he had made his toilet by licking himself only half an hour before. In appearance Kristo Baboo was the very antithesis of the match-maker. He was a tall, strongly-built man,

with irregular but handsome features, upon which pride and disappointment had stamped a look of envy and discontent. Kristo had not always been the soured, selfish man that he now was; but his whole life had been spent in a hopeless struggle against poverty; he had never been able to gratify a generous or disinterested thought; and, like many men in his position, he had caught the idea that his falling dignity could only be maintained by defying society to deny his claims to consideration. The prospect of his daughter's marriage was almost the only gleam of good luck that he had experienced in his lifetime. Adversity he could withstand with dogged stubbornness; but the faintest gleam of sunshine was too much for his eyes, dazzling his sight by the unwonted glare and intoxicating his senses. As soon as the marriage with Krishna Gossain had been suggested to him, the Baboo's innate haughtiness had led him to refuse, because he was not able to marry his daughter in a style befitting her rank; but it was characteristic of Kristo that though his intentions were lofty, his actions were mean; and he soon came to entertain the most extravagant expectations for himself and his fortunes from a union with the rich Gossains. The game that he was now playing was a saving one: to suggest difficulties which the match-maker would have to overcome, to concede rather than to agree, and to secure the fullest measure of consideration for the house of Lahory in all arrangements that might be resolved

upon. But the honour of the Gossains was perfectly safe in Bejoy's hands.

But Bejoy's mind was by no means free from misgivings. There was one part of his instructions that he had accepted with great reluctance. When Ramanath had first signified that the young folks must be allowed a meeting before the marriage was finally fixed, Bejoy had flatly declared such a thing to be entirely out of the question, to be grossly "unprofessional"—to be, in short, a proposition that should not have been mooted to a respectable practitioner like himself. And when Ramanath had represented Krishna's obstinacy upon this point, the utmost that the match-maker would do was to take time for consideration and to "search for precedents." Had not Bejoy's mind been firmly bent upon effecting a wedding, or had the principals been persons of an inferior standing, he would not have hesitated to fling up his brief rather than countenance so serious an innovation upon matrimonial etiquette. And when he did undertake the commission, it was under protest and promises of secrecy, and with the mental resolution that it was the first and last time that he should be accessory to such a practice. "Such customs," said Bejoy to himself, "go in like needles, but they come out like ploughshares. If the children are to have a hand in making up their own marriages, there is an end of the profession altogether. But in a special case like this, one can't stick for stretching a point."

"To tell you the truth, *ghatak*," said Kristo, throwing himself back carelessly among his cushions when the servants had taken away the fragments of the repast upon which he and Bejoy had regaled themselves, "I should not be very sorry if this matter were dropped. The Gossains are excellent people, and there is nobody that I respect more than Ramanath; but the boy has made such a *gol-mol* (uproar) about religion that there is a risk in having anything to do with him. He has fallen away once, and may again become an apostate; and am I going to have my daughter thrown back upon my hands again, a widow with her husband still alive?"

"No need of foreseeing unlikelihoods, Baboo," replied the match-maker, "when there are so many probabilities that demand serious attention. I can assure you that there is no chance, not even the slightest of Krishna again wavering. In fact, he never was anything but a most orthodox Hindoo, and all the scandal sprang out of a mere frolic, one of those wild pranks that boys will not forbear from."

"I know not about such pranks," grumbled Kristo, shaking his head doubtfully. "The Dipty Baboo tells me that all Calcutta was ringing with the news of Krishna's apostasy, and that his name was put in the papers. Oh Rama! I wonder he survived that disgrace. It is too much, *ghatak*, to expect that I would give my daughter to a man that has been made so infamous."

"Of course, if you give ear to what the Dipty says, reasoning is useless," retorted Bejoy, with a scornful toss of his head. "He came to me and offered two thousand rupees if I would procure your consent to a marriage with Radha; but I told him that I would not undertake the business though he should promise me a lakh. The *ghataks* of Bhutpore or Gapshapganj are good enough for the like of him, for Bejoy never went on a low-caste man's errand. The impudence of an oil-seller's son aspiring to your daughter's hand!"

"Impudence indeed, worthy Bejoy!" reiterated Kristo, not choosing to remember the encouragement which he had given to the Dipty's aspirations. "But still, all this does not convince me that I should give my girl to the Gossains. I am a lone man, and my life would be solitary without Radha."

Bejoy put on a look of grave reprobation as he responded, "Nay, but, Baboo, it cannot be that you are speaking seriously. Think of the portion prepared for those who neglect the divinely-appointed ordinances of the family. Think how you will answer to the souls of your ancestors for disappointing their hopes of posterity. Consider how culpable has been your conduct already in allowing your daughter to reach her present age unmarried. If the obligations of religion, if the fear of the gods, if the dread of future retribution," added Bejoy, solemnly, "are to have no weight with you, words of mine would be useless. When scandal turned its tongue against you, I was always only too

ready to take your part, for I thought that you were really in difficulty; but when such an offer has been made you, there can be no excuse. However, as you seem to wish it so much, we'll break off the bargain."

But Kristo was not prepared for such a conclusion. "When you speak of religion, you cut me with a diamond," he said, meekly. "I am a simple man, who has had a sore struggle with the world, but I would not knowingly offend the gods. But of course it is my duty to make the best bargain I can for my daughter."

Bejoy had now got the decided advantage, and he was not slow to make use of it. He began to state the terms on which Krishna proposed to become the Baboo's son-in-law, and which were so liberal that they left nothing to be cavilled at. Ramanath proposed, out of kindness for his old friend Kristo, to be at the whole expense of the marriage ceremonies, which should be of a character well befitting the rank of both bride and bridegroom. The arrangements, which were to be made within the priest's family, would obviate any chances of a collision occurring between the two wives, unless one or other of them was fixedly bent upon a quarrel.

Kristo would fain have objected to the provisions which secured to Chakwi complete independence of the new-comer, and which set aside her fortune absolutely for her own use, as giving her a decided

superiority over Radha; but Bejoy drily told him that he might remedy the grievance himself by settling an equal sum upon his daughter; and though he, Bejoy, had no special instructions upon that point, he would undertake that his patrons should offer no obstacles. To this suggestion Kristo had of course nothing to say, and his next stipulation was rather asked as a favour than claimed as a right. To save the honour of his family, which he thought would be compromised in the public's eyes if it were known that Ramanath had defrayed the marriage expenses, he proposed that he himself should borrow the money from Three Shells upon the priest's security, and repay the usurer when he got the money from Ramanath after the wedding. The match-maker did not see much reason for refusing the request; but he pretended to demur, and would only promise to recommend the matter to Ramanath's consideration. There was still one condition that weighed heavily upon Bejoy's mind, and he wished something kept in hand as a set-off against it. He had never yet mustered courage to tell Kristo that Krishna insisted upon seeing the maiden; and the request seemed so shockingly "unprofessional," that he did not know whether he would not be better pleased if it were refused than if it were granted. But his dignity demanded that Kristo should be made to yield all that was asked of him, and he had resolved to carry his point in this as in all other respects, regardless of his personal feelings. At length, however, all other

preliminaries were adjusted, and the match-maker was compelled to raise the dreaded question.

"Ah!" said Bejoy, "it is indeed a pleasure to do business for such gentlemen as your worship and Ramanath Gossain. No haggling, no bargaining, but each one willing to accommodate his neighbour. I have seen some marriages that could not be made up without as much *ragrajhagra* (wrangling) as if one were selling hens in the bazaar. Some people have no delicacy about them at all. And when shall Krishna see the face of his young bride?"

"After the marriage procession, with the blessing of Siva—when else?" demanded Kristo, looking up in surprise.

"Ah, yes—of course—ahem! but then, you see—the fact is, that this is a special case, and we must just consent to waive some points of etiquette. The fire of love is burning within Krishna's bosom, and he will neither have peace by day nor rest by night until he feast his eyes upon that moon-faced one. Now I, knowing your kind and amiable disposition, and that you are quite above all vulgar prejudices, took in hand to win your consent to gratifying the youth, in a quiet way—may my forwardness be forgiven."

"What!" cried Kristo, angrily; "let him look upon the maiden before he weds her! By the temple of Tarakeshwar, does he think that he will marry my daughter as he would purchase a mare—after he has looked into her mouth and put her through her paces?

I wonder you would have had the assurance to mention such a thing, *ghatak*. This will be some of the obscene English notions that he has caught up in Calcutta. The Dipty tells me that in England the young men and maidens will associate together, and make love to each other, years before they are married; but I cannot believe that there could be any people so depraved."

"Alas!" said Bejoy, with a melancholy shake of the head, "I am afraid things are not much better than you say in England. But what can be expected in a country where the very root of society is rotten? Just think for a moment how soon matters would be at sixes and fives with ourselves if young folks were to make up their own marriages."

"You don't seem to think so, when you make such a proposal in the case of my daughter," growled the Baboo. "If you go on long in this fashion you will soon find that you have been digging a pit to drown yourself in."

"The gods forbid!" echoed Bejoy, piously; "and I assure you it was not without serious scruples that I undertook to countenance such a thing. But what can a man do that has to deal with mad young lovers? And I think that if you accede to this, there will be no difficulty in persuading Ramanath to let Three Shells advance the marriage expenses to you in the first instance. You may depend, moreover, that the matter will be kept strictly secret. I would not for a thou-

sand rupees that the *ghataks* of Bhutpore or Gapshapjang should learn that I had allowed a young man and woman to come together before the knot was tied."

"Well, I suppose you will have it so," said Kristo, in a gruff voice, as he thought how his family honour would be saved if the folks of Dhupnagar could but be led to believe that he himself was defraying the marriage expenses; "but to tell you my mind, friend Bejoy, I don't like it. It is but a little matter, as you say, but then straws will bind an elephant if you plait plenty of them together. If communings between the youth of both sexes were to be tolerated, there would soon be neither marriage nor morality in Bengal."

To this proposition Bejoy warmly assented, and soon after took his leave, quietly slipping into a fold of his waist-cloth the fee which Kristo tendered, with many apologies for its insignificance. "Nay, but it is not necessary," said Bejoy, as he pocketed the cash; "a virtuous action is its own full reward. It is honour enough for me to have been the means of making happy two such excellent families. And I pray that Shashti (the patroness of children) grant the young couple an abundant increase."

"If there is another *ghatak* in Bengal that could have brought about this union," purred Bejoy to himself, as he came out into the darkness, "let him come and put his hand upon my head. I was not so glad when I married my own daughter as I am to get that girl of Kristo's off my mind, for the existence of an un-

married damsel of so high a caste, and of such rare beauty, was a slur upon my professional reputation which I could never get over. How these vile match-makers of Bhutpore and Gapshapganj will worry themselves when they hear of my success! Dogs that they are, neither of them is fit to make up the ten-rupee marriage of a shoemaker!"

In the height of his good-humour Bejoy allowed himself to be arrested by Gangooly, the headman, who was wending homewards to bed from his gossip with the other elders of the town, assembled upon the village green; and knowing that, from Gangooly's talkativeness there could be no better medium for giving the tidings of his triumph a wide circulation, the match-maker confided to him, under promises of solemn secrecy, the news of the coming marriage, doing full justice to the personal part which he himself had taken in bringing it about. Gangooly praised the *ghatak's* address, and congratulated themselves upon having so clever and trustworthy a practitioner to look after their domestic happiness; and Bejoy purred still more, while his little eyes sparkled brightly through the gloom, like those of his feline connection. But notwithstanding Gangooly's pledges, his conscience somehow permitted him to call in at Dwarkanath's door, and give the schoolmaster an inkling of what was going to happen, enjoining him to silence under the pain of his severest displeasure. Nor, when he encountered Prosunno, the lawyer, coming out of the lane from the house of

Three Shells, the money-lender, could he refrain from showing the pleader that when anything of *real* importance was astir he would not be the last to hear of it, although Prosunno had called him a chattering old parrot, and a broker of *banaos* (hatch-ups). And as he passed the oilman's shop, where old Ram Lall still sat patiently among his jars, although every other trader in the village had shut up hours before, the headman jokingly congratulated him upon the fortune that he would make off the great illuminations that were at hand; and by pretending to disbelieve his words, the crusty oilman soon picked out of Gangooly all that the headman could tell him of the approaching marriage. Hardly had Bejoy finished summing up the profits that he would make off the match, and gone to bed to dream, in his elation, that he had married the *ghatak* of Gapshapganj to a penniless pariah crone of fourscore, and his rival of Bhutpore to a she-devil from the nether world, before the news of the bridal had spread from one end of the village to the other; and the townsmen with their wives and families sat up a good hour later than their ordinary bedtime discussing the great event in all its bearings.

But there were two men in Dhupnagar who took more than a passing interest in the news. Prosunno had deemed the headman's intelligence of sufficient importance to be quickly communicated to his patron, and he had at once turned back and sought readmission to the money-lender's presence. Three Shells

heard the information with a bland smile, said he was delighted to hear that his dear young friend, Krishna, was going to marry so beautiful a wife ; and wondered how Kristo would manage to afford the expenses requisite for the nuptials. He cordially thanked Prosunno for his kind attention, and bade him a smiling good-night. But scarcely had the lawyer disappeared when a change came over the money-lender's demeanour. He clenched his fists angrily, and gnashed his thin lips with his long carnivorous-like teeth. Nothing was more clearly indicative of Three Shells' low moral nature than the animal fashion in which his emotions expressed themselves. When labouring under strong excitement, his movements were assimilated as closely to those of a wild beast as the human form would allow, and on this occasion his attitude was that of a leopard that has been balked of its prey. A savage gleam of disappointment sparkled in his eyes, the blood-thirst tingled in his tongue as it lolled out of his mouth, and his hands nervously clasped and unclasped themselves in rapid alternation. What was there in Krishna's marriage that the money-lender should be thus strangely affected? In the first place, he hated Krishna, with all the bitterness of which a fierce nature was capable, and his spleen rose at the thought of any happiness being in store for the priest's son ; and secondly, in all Three Shells' ambitious visions of the future, Kristo's daughter had occupied a prominent place. As the mahajan saw his substance daily increasing, and the

land around Dhupnagar gradually falling into his own hands, he began to think of some day assuming a position worthy of his wealth, and of forcing himself into the society of the high-caste Brahmins around him. The Ghatghar estates would soon be all his own, even if the Rajah survived the few years until the money-lender was in a position to foreclose, which was hardly to be expected in a man of so dissolute habits. Once installed in the Ghatghar palace, Three Shells might surely, without much presumption, seek the best maiden in Dhupnagar for a wife. Kristo Baboo's impecuniosity had suggested to Three Shells the idea of getting the thriftless landlord into his toils, and of reducing him to such straits that he would be glad to purchase his favour at the price of his daughter. As the owner of Ghatghar, and the son-in-law of a Lahory, Three Shells might carry his head as high as any man in the Gungaputra district; that is, when once the ashes of Ramanath, the priest, had been safely committed to the river. But now the vision was broken, and all Three Shells' hopes rudely dispelled; and what was worst of all, by the man whom he hated most bitterly of mortals. Was it for this that he had lent Kristo money at nominal interest, and upon worthless security?—that he had bought up all the liabilities of the Baboo at almost their par value wherever he could lay hands upon them? And was all that money that he had thus expended to be, as it were, thrown to the kites? Never! Three Shells swore by the skull neck-

lace of Kali that before Krishna should marry the Baboo's daughter he would play a card that was little expected; and going into his private apartment he took out his *ganja* pipe, and sat down to intoxicate himself, and to think over the best way of thwarting the course of Krishna's love.

Old Ram Lall, the oilman, was hardly less disconcerted than the money-lender by the news. It must not, however, be supposed for one instant that the vaunted descriptions of Radha's beauty had touched the flinty heart of the old curmudgeon. Such scanty charms as his wife, old Mohini, had been possessed of, were quite sufficient for Ram Lall, even in the hot days of youth; and but for her ruinous appetite and fastidiousness about going without clothes, she would have been in his eyes a perfect woman. But the oilman knew quite well the feelings which his son, the Dipty, entertained towards Kristo's daughter, and he had flattered himself that before his old eyes were closed, they would look upon grandchildren who carried in their veins some of the best Brahmin blood in Bengal. Ram Lall had done all that he could in his humble way to advance his son's suit with the Baboo. He had cringed before Kristo even to the dust whenever the latter had come the way of his shop; he had sold the Lahory family its oil at cheaper rates than he gave to any one else in the village; and, what was more, he had meted it out to them by the standard measures, and not by the false-bottomed vessel with which he

served ordinary customers. Ram Lall thought sadly that all this courtesy had gone for nothing, as he hurriedly shut up his shop, and, muffling an old rotten cloak about his shoulders to save them from the night air, he set out with a heavy foot and a heavier heart on his road to Gapshapganj. It might not yet be too late; Ram Lall's belief in the genius of his great son was perfectly limitless, and he could not think it possible that any parent would prefer such a one as Krishna to his clever and handsome son, Preonath. So Ram Lall set out; although the road to Gapshapganj was long and steep, and though he had the haunted Pagoda Tope to pass, the old man's courage never faltered. There is no heart so hard and selfish but that by careful probing some soft spot may be found in it. His intense love for his son was the redeeming feature in the oilman's sordid character, and it would have led him not only to risk the rheumatism by exposing his old body to the night air, and fatigue his frail limbs by a hurried journey, but even to give his life itself if Preonath might be benefited thereby. His heart was too great at that moment to remember how coldly the Dipty had repayed his affection, how often he would come and go to Dhupnagar without setting a foot inside the little shop, and how he had more than once ignored the presence of his old father when in the company of zemindars and rajahs and other great folks. Provided Preonath's wishes were gratified, Ram Lall in his

heroism was resolved to set his own feelings aside; but he could not help thinking that surely some show of affection would reward the anxiety on his son's account, which had brought him out at that hour of the night. The old man sadly recalled how fondly the little boy Preonath used to come bounding home from school, and to leap up to kiss him with his arms tightly clasped about his father's neck. For such a reward from the Deputy-Magistrate and Deputy-Collector of the Gapshapganj subdivision, Ram Lall felt as if he would walk from Dhupnagar to Gapshapganj, not only that night, but every night of his life. A fervent repetition of the name of Rama kept the powers of darkness in check as he passed the dreaded Pagoda Tope, and he arrived at the Dipty's quarters in Gapshapganj, weary and footsore, before the second watch was run. But the morning was not very far advanced before the undaunted old man had taken his usual place among the oil-pots, and was chaffering and cheating as eagerly as if he had passed the night in dreaming of hidden treasure, instead of in sentimental self-communion with himself upon the Gapshapganj road. Had the Dipty's filial caresses nerved the old man for such exertions? We hope so. Preonath could surely well afford to be affectionate to his father when there was no one by to witness their meeting.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THREE SHELLS DOES BUSINESS.

If haply we or you, my friend, should be driven by necessity—which Heaven avert!—to raise a temporary loan upon our watch, our ring, or any other of our little valuables, you will easily conceive that we are not likely to sound a trumpet before us on our way to the pawnbroker's. We would rather envelop ourselves in our thickest greatcoat, draw our hat down over our eyes, conceal the lower half of our face under the thickest muffler in our wardrobe, and set out for the Mount of Piety by the darkest lanes and least-frequented thoroughfares. Nor, when we are absolutely obliged to solicit a renewal of that trifling bill for another three months, do we choose to obtrude our difficulties on the attention of the public, but seek the bank-parlour and pour our embarrassments into the confidential, and let us hope sympathising, ear of the manager; and peradventure we may jauntily inquire as we pass the counter on our way out, what rates are

going on fixed deposits for twelve months certain, as if a five-hundred-pound note were at that very moment burning our fingers. Kristo Baboo felt himself in a similar situation as he started for the dwelling of Three Shells, the money-lender, on the morning after his interview with the match-maker. There were few people who had less sense of shame about borrowing than Kristo. He had never been out of debt since boyhood, and had always cancelled one obligation by incurring another. Hitherto he had cared little who knew his liabilities, and did not feel that his dignity was at all lowered by the avowal of his indigence. But matters were very different now. In a few months he would be connected with the rich Gossains, his estates would be cleared from encumbrances, he would have money in his pockets to meet all his expenses, and he would always be able to fall back upon his wealthy son-in-law whenever anything was wanted to maintain his position. But in the meantime he would have a difficulty in discounting his high prospects. He wished the people of Dhupnagar, and the world in general, to believe that he himself was defraying the cost of his daughter's bridal; and if any one was to hear of his visit to Three Shells, the circumstance might tend to destroy the delusion. He would have to bind Three Shells to secrecy, but the mahajan was a discreet man as became his profession. The interest would, of course, be high, for Three Shells would take into account the Baboo's urgent need of the money;

and it would have to be paid out of Kristo's own pocket. But all that could be referred to the golden days after the marriage; the only drawback was that a man with such high hopes before him should be absolutely penniless at the present time.

Dressed in his very best garments, wearing the heavy silver chain which had belonged to his uncle, Ganga Prasad, of blessed memory, and carrying in his hand the gold-headed ebony cane that was the chief heirloom of the Lahory family, Kristo quitted his house and sauntered carelessly through the back lanes of the village. On ordinary occasions Kristo would have been ashamed to show himself in public without a "tail" of three or four poor relations, and double that number of ragged menials; but that day he had signified that it was his pleasure to "eat the air" alone. To all outward appearance there was not a more careless man in Dhupnagar than Kristo Baboo that morning, or one that had less upon his mind. He swung his cane pompously before him; paused now and then to look up at the sky; stopped to sniff at Shama Churn the grain-seller's sweet-scented lilacs where they hung over the ruined wall; bestowed in alms the last rupee he was possessed of upon cripple Bhim, the religious beggar; cheerfully menaced a long green viper out of his path; stood up coolly at the end of the narrow lane leading to the mahajan's back-door as if to take breath, cast a wary look round about him, and in another instant he had dived into the purlieus of Three

Shells' dwelling, and was stirring up the sleepy-headed porter, who sat coiled up in the sunshine with his chin supported upon his knees. But before he could ask an audience of the money-lender the Baboo was startled by the unwelcome apparition of Gangooly emerging from the doorway.

If there was one man in Dhupnagar whom the Baboo wished to avoid more than another, that man was Gangooly. He knew the headman's propensity for chattering; that without any desire to make mischief, the old man was utterly incapable of keeping a secret, and that his first work would be to go into the bazaar and publish the news of Kristo's visit to the money-lender. Repressing a curse which, if carried into effect, would have placed the headman's future welfare in serious jeopardy, Kristo stiffly returned Gangooly's salute, and motioned to the misshapen clerk to let his master know that a visitor was waiting.

"I salute you humbly, Baboo," said Gangooly; "and I hope you will find me a good foot to meet. But who would have expected to see you here?"

"Why, anybody who knew that I have dealings with Three Shells," retorted Kristo, gruffly; "there is nothing very surprising in that, is there? It should be more wonderful to see a freeholder like you coming out of a money-lender's office. If it were not for that cursed land revenue that Government extorts from me, I would not be in debt a pice to anybody."

"Alas!" said Gangooly, shaking his head lugubri-

ously, "care comes with a family. My son, Gopal, is going to marry a second wife; he is a good lad, and mindful of his duty to the gods; and it is so short a time since I married his little sister and buried my mother-in-law that I have not as much money left as would be an alms to a wandering *jogee* (devotee). I suppose your honour has come upon the same errand?"

"How! what do you mean?" said Kristo, frowning, and drawing himself up haughtily. "I have no son to marry, and no need to borrow money though I had."

"Nay, I mean your daughter Radha's bridal. Have we not all heard of the great good luck that has come to your family? I vow I was as glad to hear the good news as if any one had given myself a *bakshish*. It was only last night that I said to my wife, Chintamony, 'Well, the Baboo has had a hard time of it, what with his high pretensions and his small rental, his unmarried daughter growing older every day, and his lands growing less; but this match with the priest's family will set him up straight again,' and she said——"

"I wish Yama would strike you dumb, you drivelling old babbler! I believe you would chatter upon your funeral pile with the last *siki* (sixpence, the Hindoo *viaticum*), stuck between your teeth," cried the angry Baboo; "my coming here has nothing to do with my daughter's marriage. The money for that has been set aside and salted these half-score years and more. I only came to take up a trifling bond of mine that hap-

pens to have fallen into Three Shells' hands—that is all my errand."

"Oh, just so," replied Gangooly, whom no rebuff ever disconcerted: "what better could a poor simpleton like me know? But, believe me, I am heartily glad to hear of your good fortune. You see, as I said to Prosunno Baboo, the pleader, last night, when a girl comes to Radha's time of life without being married, there is really no guarantee——"

"And don't go about with a drum and tell everybody that you saw me at the money-lender's taking up a bond," interrupted Kristo; "but I might as well tell you not to eat when you are hungry. If your legs only ran half as fast as your tongue, you would be the most active headman in all Bengal."

"Nay, the gods forbid that I should be a tale-bearer or a betrayer of secrets!" remonstrated Gangooly. "When a man says aught to me in confidence, it is as though he had whispered it in the ear of the dead. I have been trusted with as weighty matters as any man in the valley. Did any one ever hear *me* say aught about Rakhal Das strangling his oldest wife?—will you tell me that, Kristo Baboo?"

The altercation was cut short by the appearance of Three Shells himself, salaaming and smirking in the doorway, and inviting Kristo to walk inside, with many acknowledgments of the honour which the Baboo had done him in visiting his humble abode. Gangooly walked away, signifying by indignant grunts how un-

just he felt the suspicion to be of breach of confidence. "Some folks are as particular about their matters," snorted the headman, "as if they were engaged in a conspiracy against the King of Delhi, and their lives depended upon secrecy. Why should I talk of Kristo Baboo's affairs? I have things of more importance to take up my head with. As if the people of Dhupnagar gave themselves any concern about Kristo's going to the money-lender's! Some people surely think much of themselves."

Notwithstanding Gangooly's contempt for Kristo Baboo and his concerns, when he encountered Shama Churn, the grain-dealer, the headman could not withhold from mentioning his casual encounter with Kristo, and the cause of the latter's visit to the mahajan, enjoining, however, his gossip to the strictest secrecy on the pain of a rupture of their ancient friendship. The grain-dealer was disposed to distrust Kristo's assertion that his errand to Three Shells had no reference to Radha's marriage; but Gangooly mysteriously said that he had his own reasons to know that the Baboo was only taking up a bond; "for," reasoned the headman with himself, "if Kristo only told me about the bond to deceive me, he would never have troubled himself to keep me from talking about it;" but the Baboo knew enough of Gangooly's character to guess that the surest way to set the headman a-talking was by binding him to silence. And thus it came to be believed in Dhupnagar that Kristo Baboo, with all his

improvidence, had saved a sufficiency to marry and dower his daughter, and that the girl was a much better match than any one had supposed. When the young Rajah of Ghatghar heard the news, he anathematised the folly that had kept him from securing Radha while she was yet free, and vented his spleen by locking up his two oldest and ugliest wives for four-and-twenty hours in their own rooms without food or drink. When Agha sarcastically told young Afzul Khan of the great mistake he had made in allowing so wealthy a bride to slip through his fingers, the young Pathan muttered an imprecation, and turned away impatiently upon his heel. Dwarkanath, the schoolmaster, ventured to congratulate the priest upon the splendid marriage that Kristo intended to provide for his son, and to laud the Baboo's prudence and forethought that had regarded the honour of his family throughout all his pecuniary difficulties; and Ramanath had cheerfully concurred in the schoolmaster's encomiums.

But we must return to Three Shells and his client. When the Baboo's name was announced, the money-lender turned pale, and he convulsively grasped the low desk which lay before him as if he needed support. But it was excess of joy, and not fear, that thus discomposed him. The chief object of his solicitude at that moment was to get Kristo into his power, and at the very instant of the Baboo's arrival he was sighing over the hopelessness of every plan that had presented itself to his mind. He had made himself sure that the

Gossains would supply the marriage expenses, and aid the Baboo to meet his present necessities; and for once in his life Three Shells felt that his genius for intrigue was at fault.

"Now the gods be praised, for their hands are in it!" ejaculated the money-lender inwardly, as he shuffled towards the door to greet his patrician visitor. "O Siva, blessed benefactor, you are not one to remain a debtor to a votary! My *lota* (goblet) to the Linga is more than repaid by this chance. Continue thus to befriend your slave, and he will give you a *muhr** where hitherto he has given but a *cowry*."

Three Shells, all smiles and politeness, led the Baboo into his inner office, and seated him upon a pile of the softest cushions, while he himself stood respectfully by with folded hands and bent head, waiting to hear what Kristo had to say to him.

"Won't you sit, Three Shells Baboo," said Kristo, making an effort to be jocular, "and not be a stranger in your own house? Draw in about, and guess what has brought me here to-day."

"How can I guess, a poor ignorant man like me?" simpered Three Shells, with affected diffidence, as he planted himself face to face with the Baboo, a closer proximity than the proud Brahmin could altogether relish; "it would be presumption to imagine that your

* The gold *muhr*, a coin obsolete except among jewellers, is = sixteen rupees, or thirty-two shillings sterling; the *cowry* is a small shell, the lowest unit of Indian currency.

honour has taken the trouble of coming to tell so humble a person of the great marriage which your daughter is going to make with the son of my revered friend, Ramanath, the priest."

Three Shells said this with half-closed eyes, and lips that hardly parted to let the words through them; but he could not control a scornful toss of the head, nor prevent pride from puffing out his lean frame, and stiffly straightening his cringing back.

"Why say presumption, friend Three Shells," replied the Baboo, "when I am so well assured of the kindly interest which you take in the welfare of my family? Have you not repeatedly shown it by your benefactions?"

"Yes, there was the bond for eight hundred rupees, granted the year of the dear rice, upon which there has been only one payment of interest," returned Three Shells, with affected simplicity; "and then there was the bill of sale upon the Gaogong holding, granted as security for an advance which has——"

"Ah, yes, I remember these trifles," interrupted Kristo; "I'll have time to look into them by-and-by and you shall be nothing the loser. It was in a general way that I spoke of your friendship. And now, as you conjectured, I am come to tell you of my daughter's marriage."

"And I rejoice to hear it—yea, even as Rama joyed when the monkey-god brought him back news from his imprisoned Sita," said Three Shells, with a bland smile,

but never opening his eyes. Verily, Ramanath's son is a good youth, and a learned youth, and one that worships the gods devoutly in the way of his fathers. I have always loved Krishna."

And the money-lender opened his eyes to their widest limit, and then blinked in the light as he watched upon Kristo's countenance the effect of his sneer at Krishna's scepticism. But Kristo's face was immovable.

"The Gossains are of a good caste," he replied; "and that is the main thing for me to look to; and besides, they have held out terms that a poor Brahmin like me could hardly venture to refuse. I may tell you, friend Three Shells, that all the expenses of this bridal are to come out of Ramanath's own pocket; but that must be a secret between us."

Three Shells' lower lip fell, his eyes were again opened wide, and his body seemed to collapse where he sat as his ear caught this announcement. "The worthy Ramanath is a good man, and a rich man, and can well afford to be thus liberal," he slowly answered; "and how can money be better spent than by uniting excellent families, and gladdening the hearts of departed ancestors by perpetuating their issue?"

"Well said, Three Shells!" cried Kristo, slapping his hand heartily upon his thigh; "you speak like a Shashtri. It *is* a good and acceptable work to the gods to aid a marriage betwixt the twice-born; never doubt it. And knowing well your great love for the Gossains, as

also your kindly friendship for myself, I have come to ask your obliging assistance."

Three Shells revived again: again his back became rigid, his head was tossed up, his eyes half closed, and his lips pursed into a melancholy smile.

"Assistance? Of what sort?" asked he, shortly.

"I know you to be a discreet man, friend Three Shells," said Kristo, "and one that will talk of anything rather than the affairs of your customers. Now Ramanath does not care that the gossiping mischief-mongers of Dhupnagar should know at whose expense the powder is burnt and the sweetmeats eaten, and I think with him. So we have deemed it best that I should borrow the money from you for two months, and transact matters as if I were paying out of my own purse. What say you to that?"

Three Shells heaved a deep sigh, and filled his hands with the soft velvet cushion on which he was sitting. It was with difficulty that he kept himself from jumping up and uttering a howl of exultation over his prey. "The fool puts his head into my hands unasked," he thought: "the *lota*—the *lota;* it is my gift to the temple that has done this; nothing is misspent that is given to the gods."

But he mastered his triumph, and hesitatingly replied, "I would do much for the Gossains, or for you either, Baboo; but money is scarce, and hard to get, and I know not how I could scrape together such a sum as you require. Money comes by favour of the

gods; but it goes in their favour also. It is but lately, as you may perchance have heard—but such a trifle would hardly stay your attention—that I made rather a costly present to the Linga of Dhupnagar, and I have been somewhat straitened for funds since."

"Heard of it! who has not heard of your great offering, and seen it too?" cried Kristo, heartily; "*Sri-Krishna-ji*! for a week after it was put in the temple you would have thought a miracle had been wrought, there were such crowds of people thronging to look at it. It was 'Good Three Shells!' 'What a pious usurer!' 'How mindful of the gods!' 'So benevolent to his customers!' in a strain as long as a canto of the 'Mahabharata.' My eyes never looked upon so pretty a vessel. But we all know that you might put one like it in every temple within the valley, and yet know yourself none the poorer."

Three Shells was melted in a measure by the flattery, but he shook his head in negation, and heaved a deep sigh, as if he wished that all that were true.

"Nay," he replied, with assumed meekness, "I am but a poor man. A person in my trade can never call his wealth his own but from day to day. When a client goes *phut* (smashed) our money melts away, and no one says he is sorrow for a usurer. I have had some heavy losses of late, and between these and bad-paying borrowers I am wellnigh brought to the bare walls."

"Tush!" said Kristo, "don't tell me that. If you count me among the bad-paying borrowers I shall

make you change your mind yet. Wait until a month after this marriage, and you will be paid anna and pice, principal and interest, and get such a *bakshish* over and above as shall make you bless the hour when you did business with Kristo Dass Lahory. You know well enough that I am no niggard when I get money in my hands."

"Ah, I am well aware of that," responded Three Shells, moving a little closer to the Baboo; "and there is no one in Dhupnagar whom I would be more willing to serve than yourself. And Ramanath, the priest, too, I feel towards him as to a father. I would put myself far about to oblige him."

As Three Shells shook his head sentimentally, he put forth his hand upon the Baboo's shoulder, and patted a gentle emphasis to the assurance of his fondness for the Gossain family. The high-caste Brahmin shrank at heart from the touch of a vile out-caste, but he was borrowing money, and any open expression of disgust would have been fatal to his success. "May you stew for a *yuga* (an age) amid the boiling metal of Kali Sutra for thus defiling a pure Brahmin!" ejaculated Kristo, inwardly. But he said aloud, "I may look to your kindness then for assistance in this matter?"

"You see," said the money-lender, sitting quite close to the Baboo, and taking him cordially by the hand, "my power will not go so far as my desire in this matter, but yet I will do what I can. How much do you want?"

The sweat was sitting in beads upon Kristo Baboo's brow, and there was a faintness at his heart that made him fear lest he should swoon in the money-lender's presence. The idea that he, Kristo, the son of Gopi, the head of the Lahory family, a man of untainted caste, should be sitting cheek by jowl with a vile pariah, hand joined in hand, was too much for the Brahmin's stomach. A Carolinian of "first family" rank bestowing a fraternal embrace upon his own "nigger" would have been as comfortable. But the remorseless Three Shells seemed not to mark the Baboo's agitation.

"I can't do with less than ten thousand rupees," Kristo replied, in a weak voice; "the marriage alone will take five or six thousand, and I have other necessities pressing me."

"Ten thousand rupees," said Three Shells, musingly; "strange, now, how things fit into each other. I have received that sum this very day on account of my honoured correspondent Banksi Lall of Barra Bazaar in Calcutta. I might let you have that, but I could not do it unless you would take it as repayable at four-and-twenty hours' notice. I really could not give you it upon any other terms."

"Nay, nay, Three Shells, that would never do," said Kristo, shaking his head, and endeavouring to move farther away from the money-lender; but Three Shells kept him fast in his grip; "we will rather borrow from

yourself at a longer term. Never mind the interest; say you will take a six months' bond."

"Impossible!" cried Three Shells, holding up his hands. "I have not a hundred rupees in the house. There never was such a run upon money as at present. I must charge you six per cent more than the old rate for Banksi's money. There is not another man in Dhupnagar except yourself that I would lend it to,—except Ramanath, the priest—ah, yes, always except Ramanath. I love that man as a father, Baboo."

"Ah, well, I suppose I must take it," said the Baboo, with a sigh, rising up to his feet as he saw Three Shells again preparing to take his hand; "but you are not going to try any of your tricks with us, mind. No pressing for the money until after the marriage."

"Nay," said Three Shells, "the money is not mine to crave; it is my friend Banksi's; it is with him you will have to deal. But you need not be afraid of him. A most lenient usurer is Banksi; he quite beggars himself to accommodate his clients. You will tell Ramanath how much I have striven to meet his wishes. Oh, what an excellent, what a righteous man, is Ramanath! There surely is no one in Dhupnagar so base as to cherish an ill feeling to him. How glad I am that this marriage has come about!"

And Three Shells again laid a hand upon the Brahmin's shoulder, while with the other he took hold of the breast of his coat. But the loan was negotiated

and Kristo would no longer endure the contamination of the money-lender's proximity.

"And when will the money be sent me?" he said, shaking himself free of the mahajan without much ceremony.

"I will bring it myself to-night," said Three Shells, "when I have prepared the necessary documents. We must have everything *pakha* (correct), so that Banksi Lall shall have no cause to quarrel with his humble friend, Three Shells. Not that Banksi would quarrel with anybody; he is much too mild for that. My only fear is that when you find how easy a usurer Banksi Lall of Barra Bazaar is, you will never think of honouring poor Three Shells with your custom. But Banksi is rich, and can afford to be liberal. Peace be with your honour, then, if you *will* go. Forget not my respects to Ramanath," added he, calling out as Kristo hurried unceremoniously away; "ah, there are few men like him; may the gods——"

"Pinch both him and you with hot tongs in the fires of Patala to all eternity," concluded the money-lender, in his natural tones, as the Baboo disappeared. "I have him in my hands as firmly as though he were bound with a threefold chain. And Ramanath can now be safely removed. Oh, Three Shells! this is the best day's business you have ever done in Dhupnagar."

Radha's marriage expenses were not the only loan that Three Shells had engaged to advance that morn-

ing. Gangooly, the village headman, had supplicated the mahajan to have mercy upon the heart of his son, Gopal, and to help the youngster to a second wife. The headman had wished to hypothecate his spring crop and a yoke of oxen, but Three Shells declined to invest upon such security. He next offered to pledge the right of his house and homestead, but this the usurer absolutely refused to look at, as appertaining to the public. Gangooly was at his wits' end when Three Shells led the conversation away by an easy channel to the packet which Ramanath had deposited with him; and presently offered the astonished headman the very sum he had been suing for upon the security of the priest's papers. "If you put these papers in my hands I shall know that my money is safe," Three Shells had said; "for your *izzat* (reputation) would be gone if Ramanath reclaimed the packet and you could not produce it; but oxen die, and spring crops are either blighted or burnt up when I lend money upon them;" and the headman had joyfully accepted the loan on these terms.

"It gives us a good long day, for the papers are not likely to be wanted until Ramanath's death," soliloquised Gangooly to himself as he walked homeward; "and the money comes to us like found treasure. I shall now pledge the bullocks to Jotee Lall at Gapshapganj, and the crops to Bullal Sen of Bhutpore, and we will even have a blithesome bridal in a quiet way,

although it will be but a poor affair compared with the wedding of Krishna and Radha."

Be it recorded for once in the life of Gangooly that he kept Three Shells' terms for advancing this loan to himself, self-interest in this instance overcoming his innate love of babbling.

CHAPTER XXV.

IRA FUROR BREVIS EST.

When Kristo Baboo left the mahajan's office he was boiling over with rage. The offensive familiarity with which Three Shells had treated him, not less than the consciousness of his dependence upon the object of his contempt, had mortified the proud Brahmin more than the rudest refusal could have done. It mattered little to him now though all Dhupnagar saw him issuing from the money-lender's, or even though they knew what his errand there had been. He had fallen in his own self-respect, and nothing that his neighbours would either think or say could add to his shame. As with many of his race, Kristo's mind was peculiarly constituted in this respect. He could do a mean, or even a wicked action without forfeiting any share of his self-esteem; nay, his guilt might have been made manifest without causing him a blush; but the thought that he had forfeited any of the respect to which his high caste entitled him was far more painful to him than either

guilt or remorse. Now that Three Shells, the money-lender, a man of low caste, or worse, had dared to treat him as an equal, to sit down by his side, to take him by the hand, and to use him as familiarly as if they had been foster-brothers, it was of little consequence, Kristo thought, though Protap, the accountant, should see him quitting the mahajan's premises, or that Dwarkanath, the schoolmaster, should be watching him from a back window. Kristo was too much incensed to care for concealment, and he hurried home as fast as he could, scowling angrily at everybody whom he encountered, and paying no regard to their respectful greetings. "Whatever may have been Kristo's errand at the mahajan's, it has come but little speed," said Dwarkanath to himself, as he scanned the Baboo's excited demeanour; "and I should not wonder but this grand marriage of his may go *phut* (broken) after all."

It was a relief to the Baboo when he reached his own house, and could vent a portion of his ill-humour. He slapped the porter, who was snoozing as he entered; he abused Kanya, the old bearer, for the disorderly state of the courtyard; and when Ashutosh Lahory, his poor relation, would have also taken up his testimony against Kanya's carelessness, the Baboo bade him, with an oath, begone from the house, if his worship was dissatisfied with it. Ashutosh, of course, made a humble apology, and would have endeavoured to fawn himself again into the Baboo's favour, had not

Kristo prayed that he might be struck dumb and never recover his speech until he saw a greater fool than himself. He pushed Sukheena roughly aside as he met the waiting-woman on the stairs, and he even forgot himself so far as to cast an entirely undeserved aspersion upon the virtue of his old nurse Lutchmee when he nearly stumbled over the tottering crone upon the landing. Calling for fire to his hookha, he entered his own room, and threw himself down at full length among the cushions to fume and fret over his mortifications.

"Let no man say the mango is sweet until he has tasted it," growled Kristo. "I have got all that I had desired—my daughter honourably betrothed, the money for her marriage forthcoming, and nothing to be paid out of my purse save that cursed usurer's interest; yet there is not a more miserable wretch than I am in all Dhupnagar. Curse the impertinence of that cur! What did he see in me to embolden him to take such liberties? But I'll make him rue his impudence, the low-bred hound! I'll make him kiss my feet before he gets his money again; and when I do give him the cash, I shall treat him worse than if he were a sweeper. 'Here, thou son of a defiled mother,' I'll say, giving the bag of rupees a kick with my foot, 'take thy dross, which has been hallowed by the use of a pure Brahmin! Take it—begone! and forget the road to Kristo Baboo's door! And remember this, that too much grace has been already done thee in permitting our eyes to behold thy impurities, and our nostrils to be

offended by the foulness of thy person. Hence with thy uncleanness! and forget not Kristo Baboo has lusty *lathials* (club-men) to drive away whatever mangy cur dares to wag a tail at their master!'" And Kristo bestowed a hearty kick upon the imaginary money-lender. "But, holy Krishna! what a fool I am to let such a slave annoy me thus! Let me make myself happy by thinking what great things I shall do with the Gossains' money," he added, as he lighted his hookha, and shook up the cushions to his satisfaction.

But that day the gods had surely conspired against Kristo's peace. Long before he returned from Three Shells', Jaddoo, the Dipty's orderly, had come trotting into the Lahory compound with a letter from his master. Jaddoo was still doing "special duty" at Dhupnagar, and indeed the orderly had no disposition to relinquish a task which proved to be a pleasant sinecure. In Dhupnagar Jaddoo was a person of worship; the people salaamed to him a degree or two lower than they did to their own headman; and he lived liberally, and at free quarters, with all who had anything to hope or fear from the course of justice. With regard to the robberies, his special mission, Jaddoo had little to communicate, but he made up for the scantiness of his information by the fullest details of what was transpiring on both sides of the village green, at the Linga's temple, and the house of Lahory. When the Dipty grumbled, and threatened to supersede Jaddoo by a more efficient detective, the orderly had un-

folded the plot which he had overheard at Rutton Pal's, suppressing only the mention of Radha, and making out plunder to have been the object of Afzul and Agha. After this it was not difficult to persuade the Dipty that Jaddoo was the most likely man to deliver his enemies bound into his hand; and the orderly was suffered to return to Dhupnagar, and to spend his time as suited his inclination.

When Jaddoo was roused from his slumbers in the early morning with the news of the marriage contract between Krishna and Radha, he had seen the necessity of instantly communicating with his master. And so, although the morning was hard and chill, and though he felt a keen appetite for breakfast, Jaddoo hurried out of the village, munching a handful of plantains as he went along. He knew that he was the bearer of bad tidings, and he dreaded the welcome which the Dipty might extend to him; but his duty required him to risk the magistrate's ill-temper. As he neared the Pagoda Tope he met old Ram Lall, the oilman, coming wearily down the hill. Ram Lall had been ill at ease, he said, overnight, and had gone early abroad to see if a breath of fresh air would do him any good; whither was Jaddoo away so early? Jaddoo was away to wait upon his master, worthy Ram Lall's honoured son. Had the oilman heard of the grand wedding that was going to take place between young Krishna and Kristo Baboo's daughter? No, he had not, but he was very glad to

hear it; it would surely be a great show that such rich folks would make: and old Ram Lall smilingly wished they would buy the oil for the illuminations from his shop, and resumed his journey, giving Jaddoo a civil good-day. Jaddoo stood looking doubtfully after the old man, for he could not help suspecting that Ram Lall had already taken his message out of his mouth; but still Jaddoo would have to go forward himself. If Ram Lall had told the Dipty of the marriage, the orderly comforted himself with the reflection that the first ebullition of the magistrate's wrath would have been expended before he reached Gapshapganj. And so the orderly resumed his journey with less haste than at the outset.

On his arrival at the Dipty's quarters, Jaddoo happily found that his misgivings had been groundless. Preonath was in a most gracious mood, and ordered Jaddoo off to refresh himself after the journey before he would hear a word of his news. On the orderly's return, Preonath put a number of good-humoured queries to him respecting his duties at Dhupnagar; whether the Muhammadans were remaining quiet, and whether anything new was stirring about the valley; but whenever Jaddoo would have spoken of Kristo Baboo and his affairs, the Dipty skilfully shifted the conversation into a different channel. A less astute man than Jaddoo might have seen that his information had been forestalled; and the orderly, remembering his rencontre with Ram Lall, knew at once that the old

man had been with his son overnight. It was fortunate that Jaddoo had chanced to come, the Dipty said, for he had a letter to write to the Magistrate Sahib Eversley about the robberies, and would now be able to put the latest intelligence in it. He had also a letter to send to Dhupnagar, which Jaddoo could carry; but there was no hurry about it, and the orderly might go and see his friends; Preonath would summon him when the note was written. So Jaddoo went away to seek his brethren the *amlah* (court officials), and to exchange with them the news of Dhupnagar for the gossip of Gapshapganj.

The morning was far advanced, and Preonath had taken his seat upon the bench before Jaddoo was sent for. The order of business had been altered to take up a case of considerable importance which had for some time been depending upon the files of the court. Kristo Baboo had enhanced the rents of all his tenants in the pergunnah of Garibghar, lying between Milkiganj and the town lands of Bhutpore; and the ryots, who were resident cultivators, with rights dating from the days of the Moghals, refused to pay the increase. Kristo, trusting to his interest with the Dipty, had selected a ryot as the representative of the others, and brought a summary suit for the enhanced rent in Preonath's court. Unscrupulous as Preonath was in perverting the course of justice, he could not trifle with the rights of a whole pergunnah, and so he had gone on postponing the case from time to time as the best way of saving his own

credit with his superiors, and at the same time retaining a hold upon Radha's father. But when Preonath got the news of the marriage he felt that the time was come for action, and accordingly the case of Kristo Dass Lahory *v.* Gopal Ryot was the first called when the Dipty came into court. In the bustle that ensued before the lawyers were ready—our friend Prosunno appearing for the defence—the Dipty had time to send for Jaddoo and deliver his instructions.

"You will take this note to Kristo Baboo," he said in a low voice, "and you will run all the way to Dhupnagar as if a tiger were behind you. The Baboo will send back an answer by you, and if he wishes to detain you, you may tell him what case is going on, and say that you must hasten back to give evidence in it. Be sure and let him clearly know that the cause will not be decided till you return. And, Jaddoo, I need not tell you that a close mouth swallows no dust. I will reward you well when you come back."

Jaddoo bowed an assent, and quickly disappeared from the village, and in less than three hours he was trotting through the bazaar of Dhupnagar with his shoes slung over his shoulder, and the sweat running in drops from his face. Old Ram Lall looked up from his pots with a glance of intelligence as the messenger hurried past him; but it was the hour of full market in Dhupnagar, and nobody else took any notice of the orderly's precipitancy.

When Kristo returned from his interview with Three

Shells, Jaddoo was waiting, letter in hand, but the great man in his wrath deigned not to notice him, and kicks and curses seemed then to be too plentiful for Jaddoo to rashly obtrude himself upon the Baboo's attention. Thus the first opportunity was let slip, and Jaddoo was left in the court-yard to do his best by bribery for obtaining admission to the master's presence. But welcome as was the unwonted sight of silver to Kristo's domestics, none of them would dare to face the Baboo until his rage had subsided; and so Jaddoo was forced to remain in an agony of impatience, tossed to and fro betwixt contending fears, the dread of incurring his master's anger by delay, and the danger of being beaten if he should unadvisedly present himself as a scapegoat to Kristo Baboo's ill-humour. Weighing these things carefully in his mind, and reflecting that a beating was but a temporary misfortune, while the loss of his master's favour would ruin his future prospects; bethinking himself also that the rupee which he expected from the Dipty on his return might well be made two by a piteous tale of broken bones and bruises,—Jaddoo, like a true hero, chose the more immediate danger, and began to screw his resolution up to the point of facing the Baboo. A fee of four annas secured the guidance of Kanya, the bearer, as far as the door of Kristo's "growlery," but neither money nor prayers could prevail on him to announce the messenger.

Left to his own devices, Jaddoo gently opened the

door and peeped in, but shut it again as softly when once he had seen the state of the interior. Kristo's back was turned towards the door as he lay among the cushions, and his right hand played with a heavy slipper, the sight of which made Jaddoo involuntarily raise his arm to guard his head. There could be little doubt that Kristo would salute him with that, or with his hookha-stand, or with some other missile, if he stood far enough aloof to give the Baboo room to throw; on the other hand, if he ventured too close he would place himself within range of Kristo's arm, and that would be even a worse position. Once more opening the door, Jaddoo made a nice calculation as to the mean proportional which would place him inside the range of a projectile and outside that of a blow, and slipping quietly in, posted himself close, and yet not too close, to the recumbent Baboo.

"And then there is that cursed Dipty," said Kristo aloud to himself, "who will be clucking like a hen when her egg has been taken away from her. But even his impudence cannot say that he had a promise. However, he can't do me much harm, for I'll give up going to law altogether after the marriage. I wonder if he has heard the news yet."

Jaddoo, knowing that he was in a position to solve the Baboo's doubts upon this matter, thought the moment a favourable one for announcing his presence, and he accordingly ventured upon a strangled "hem," the echo of which made him leap as if he had been

shot. Kristo turned quickly round, and cast a look of stupid amazement at the intruder.

"Who art thou, O defiler of thy sister, that walkest into my house as into a serai?" roared Kristo, paralysed for the moment with passion. "Are thy bones made of green bamboo, and thy skin of three-ply elephant-hide, that thou thus layest thyself down beneath the flail? Who's there? Ho! Kanya! Durjun! Tukht Singh! Clubs here, and quick with them!"

"Nay, great king; but a letter from the worthy magistrate, Preonath Dass, sent by the hand of the humblest of his and your honour's slaves," cried Jaddoo, dropping on his knees and holding out the note, but keeping, at the same time, a sharp look-out upon the door. "May good fortune follow me into your house, and may your favour extend to the remotest corners of the seven climes! You are worthy of worship as a cow from Kasi (Benares)." Kristo's reply was to snatch the letter from the orderly's hand, and to plant under the messenger's ear a box so sound that it prostrated him at full length upon the floor. "Nay, then, if Ganga has a place for me, why should I live? Let the will of the gods have its way," groaned Jaddoo, as he stretched himself out with folded hands, in corpse fashion, upon the floor.

Kristo had meanwhile torn open the Dipty's letter, and was spelling it slowly over with many angry comments.—"Is 'loath to believe it true'—is he? Does the low-bred cur think that good luck should come to

no one's door but his own? I am 'well aware of the depth and purity of his affection for my charming daughter'—am I? O Vishnu! have the gods lost all control of the world nowadays? He cannot think that I 'would have encouraged and countenanced his suit so much with the purpose of deluding him.' Encourage and countenance him! I'd as soon have encouraged a sweeper to smoke with me. He knows that I 'would not willingly plunge him into affliction and despair.' I'd willingly plunge him into the deepest darkness of hell—yea, even into the lowermost recesses of Andha-Tamisra. I must 'pause before I break the garland of peace that binds us both together.' Must I? I should certainly be in no hurry to cut the cord that bound his neck to the gallows. And he hopes that I will 'hear the propositions which he has to make before committing my daughter to Christians and kine-killers.' Umph! as though the son of a pariah oil-seller were one whit better than a Christian. What is this? 'Should I kindly favour his suit, I may ever command him in all that lies in his power.' Why was not his hand blasted before it penned such insolence to a high-born Brahmin? It is enough to make one turn atheist altogether," added Kristo, bestowing a hearty kick upon the orderly's posteriors.

"Stay—here is something more: 'I entreat you to send back the messenger with your decisive reply as quickly as possible.' Of course I shall. Get up, O unclean one! and tell thy vile master to vow a purse

of gold *muhrs* to the Linga of Dhupnagar that his filthy carcass may be saved from the *lathies* (quarter-staves) of my servants; for that Kristo Dass Lahory has sworn to take vengeance upon the Sudra that had dared to lift an eye to daughter of his. Hence with thy answer, pig!" And Kristo impressed the message upon Jaddoo's memory with a second kick more vigorous than its predecessor.

"Nothing disquiets my mind but the thought of my poor children. There are enough of rupees to settle my funeral expenses rolled up in an old *pagri* (turban) in the second rat-hole over the door of my house," said Jaddoo, faintly, but with a placid smile on his face.

"Don't think to frighten me by your shamming," cried Kristo, falling again upon the orderly with his feet, which, luckily for Jadoo, were at the time unshod. "I'd just as soon kill you wholly as half."

A low groan was Jaddoo's only answer.

"Here Tukht Singh! Kanya! Who's there?" cried the Baboo; and, as the servants made their appearance, he added, "Here is a blackguard who has taken a fancy for dying. Just carry him round to the back of the house and put a few kindled sticks beneath him. If he stands that, we shall have him burnt on the banks of the Gungaputra like a good Hindoo, forthwith."

The attendants carried the orderly round to the back part of the compound, and laid him down on an old, rickety *charpai* (four-legged bed). "You had better

be hence, friend Jaddoo, before we come back with the fire," whispered the good-natured bearer, Kanya Lall; "for the Baboo's orders are not to be gainsaid, when his liver is boiling as hotly as to-day."

But no answer gave Jaddoo, nor did he move a muscle, until the servants had entered the house to fetch lighted torches to begin the torture; then, looking cautiously about him, the orderly sprang swiftly to his feet, leaped the compound wall, and never halted until he had put half-a-dozen gardens and lanes between him and the house of Lahory.

"May I die childless if I don't go home and lie in bed for six weeks," gasped Jaddoo, as he paused to breathe, and to rub his aching back; "and I'll swear that it is all owing to the injuries from Kristo. I'll swear, too, that I was carried home by friends if I don't meet any one. Oh! shall not my master make that cursed Lahory rue his insolence?"

Notwithstanding the effects of Kristo's brutality, Jaddoo was not long in making his way to the Gapshapganj court-house, where the case of Kristo Dass Lahory *v.* Gopal Ryot was still going on. Preonath had tried the case with great impartiality and legal acumen, had kept the pleaders to their briefs, and had brought forward some points of evidence that were being overlooked by Kristo's lawyer. Both pleaders looked anxiously into the Dipty's face to see if they could read the probable decision; but nothing was apparent there save the gravest attention. All the evidence was concluded

and the court only waited for the Dipty's judgment; but Preonath was in no hurry. He adjourned the case until afternoon, and retired to his private room to wait the return of Jaddoo. At length Jaddoo came and told without reserve all the indignities that the Baboo had heaped upon his worship, and upon the humblest of his worship's servants; and added many other items from his own imagination that he thought would be calculated to inflame his master against the high-handed Brahmin. Preonath, however, smiled good-humouredly, commiserated Jaddoo upon his injuries, rewarded his services with a rupee, and returned to the court-room with an aspect of the utmost good-humour and benignity. Then he sat down upon the bench, and delivered a most admirable prelection upon the law of landlord and tenant, animadverting with the utmost severity upon the unprincipled attempt which had been made to deprive a whole pergunnah of honest peasants of their natural rights, and decreeing, with expenses, against the plaintiff Kristo Dass Lahory. Prosunno, the pleader, had been dozing in his seat when the Dipty began his judgment, for experience had shown him that it was useless to hold a brief against Kristo Baboo in the Gapshapganj court; but he soon started to his feet, and long before the Dipty's harangue had drawn to a close, he had despatched a messenger to Garibghar, and another to Dhupnagar, with the tidings of the decision. The poor ryots of Garibghar lighted up their village that night as if there had been a *puja*

(feast), and sent into Bhutpore for a band of music and dancers, for their hearts were glad that their lands were saved to them; but there is no reason to suppose that the intelligence wrought any change for the better in Kristo Baboo's temper when he heard of it before going to bed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MOTH AND CANDLE.

The scene changes again to Radha's chamber, where Kristo's daughter is leisurely making a splendid toilet with the assistance of Sukheena, her waiting-woman. Now, as we have before intimated, a Hindoo *zenana* is a ticklish place for a male to enter, more especially for an infidel Englishman, whose lips are bloody with steaks cut from the holy rumps of kine, and whose palate is polluted with brandy and like abominations. Inquisitive as we naturally are, we would not have it thought that our curiosity had ever overcome that feeling of delicacy which we entertain where womankind is concerned—to say nothing of the staves of Tukht Singh and his fellows—or that we ever had the temerity to see with the bodily eye and hear with the bodily ear such transactions as are set down in the following chapter. But for all that, we pledge our credit—a heavier pawn than you perhaps think, Mr Cynic—that the events which we are going to record are quite

as veracious as any other part of this truthful narrative. And why should they not be so, although coming to us at second hand? If you will only exercise your imaginations a little, you will see a number of ways by which we could have got our information; Sukheena, for instance, might have told Gangooly, under solemn promise of secrecy, which would not, however, have prevented the worthy headman from confiding in so trustworthy a character as ourselves. But this is thrown out merely as a suggestion; we, unlike many writers of, it is to be feared, laxer principles, *never* divulge the secrets which our well-informed friends intrust to us.

Radha was taking more than usual pains with her person that evening. A robe of spidery muslin, softer than silk, and whiter than the down that lies beneath the turtle-dove's wing, was rolled twice round her body, but yet without concealing the graceful curvature of her form. The embroidered fringe of her garment fell a little below the knee, revealing shapely legs, hard and smooth as pieces of marble sculpture, exquisitely-turned ankles, and feet that seemed made to trip upon nothing. Two tiny slippers of scarlet cloth, embroidered with gold, lay close by; but who could think of the beauty of the cage while looking at the bird? Radha's arms were bare from the shoulders, and her robe was girt about her breast with coquettish tightness, to show the fulness of her bust. But the voluptuous graces of her figure were thrown

far in the background by the calm beauty and queenly carriage of her head and face. It was as if the head and neck of Artemis Diana had been planted upon the body and limbs of Venus Anadyomene.

The last rays of sunlight came darting across the valley from the ridges of Panch Pahar, and glancing in at the *zenana* window, played lovingly upon the lake of rippling brown hair that Sukheena supported upon her arm, as she combed the soft locks down from the maiden's head. The brown tresses glistened like liquid amber in the fast-fading sunlight, and seemed almost to reflect the flash of the jewelled earrings, as the little head was proudly tossed backwards. The hair and the eyes were the two fatal charms of Radha's beauty. Like the poisoned seeds of Eastern fable that, once swallowed, take fast root in the stomach, and shoot out their deadly tendrils to twine around the vital organs, so Radha's silky locks, once beheld, twisted themselves about the heart, and fettered its free beatings, until all the rest of the body began to languish, as it were, through lack of the life-sustaining blood. And then her eyes, large, brown, and lustrous, melting as water, and yet hard as diamond, shaded by long soft eyelashes, and by lids which, when shut, could hardly keep in the brightness of the orbs that lay beneath them—what chance for weak mankind when these became converted into Love's artillery? When Radha had examined herself critically in the tawdry gilt mirror, had walked backwards and forwards through the room to

see that her robe lay smoothly and gracefully upon her person, and had shaken her little ears to set her bell pendants a-tinkling, she turned round to Sukheena with a smile and a sigh of relief.

"There," said she, "I am fully equipped now. Might I hold a *swayamvara** for a husband, Sukheena, as maids of yore used to do when they wanted to get married?"

"Ay, mistress, that you might," replied the attendant; "and the proudest Baboos in Bengal would come to it if they only knew the half of your loveliness."

"Surely it is time that Krishna were coming," said the mistress; "you said he would be here by sundown, and lo! the peaks of Panch Pahar are black already."

"Ah, lady, you weary for your lover," laughed Sukheena; "did I not tell you, that for all your show of scorn, you would be eager enough for the wedding-day? But it is not dark yet; you know it would not do for the townsfolk to see him coming. But patience, my dove; your mate will soon fly hither."

"As though I cared for him," retorted Radha, with a haughty toss of the head. "I think nothing of him as a lover, but the boy will do quite well for a husband. And what does he come here for just now? Does he think that I am either blind or lame, and wishes to make his eyes his merchant before the bargain be

* The *swayamvara* of the heroic ages was akin to the tournament of European chivalry, the bride bestowing her hand upon the man who bore himself best in the lists.

struck? I don't like to be seen of men in this fashion, Sukheena," and the beauty affected an indignant pout.

"Nay, it is his great love," argued Sukheena, "that will neither give him peace day nor night until he has opened up his heart to you. And you must be good to him, mistress, and love him back again—sigh when he sighs, and coyly cast down your eyes when he speaks to you; and you must not scorn nor lightly his vows, for slighted love is the seed of hatred."

"For a widow that never knew her husband, you speak boldly upon such a subject, my good Sukheena," said Radha, ironically. "Shall I ask how you come to know so much about love-making?—well, no, I had better spare your blushes and my own ears. But tell me when you saw the Muhammadan last?"

"Shameless!" cried Sukheena, "to mention his ill-omened name when your future husband's foot is already on the threshold. How could you hope to be happy and go on thus wickedly? If ever that unclean one puts a foot inside our compound after this, I shall confess all to your father."

"I should wrinkle my brows and ruffle my hair if I were to get angry with you just now, Sukheena," said Radha, languidly; "so go away, and do not irritate me. Away and watch for the approach of my brave bridegroom, and give me timely notice that I may put on my holiday smiles, and heat up a kiss or two to regale him with."

Sukheena left the room, shaking her head gravely at

her mistress's flippancy, and Radha was left alone in the chamber. Giving one more glance at herself in the darkening mirror, the maiden stepped to the window and looked down the road that leads to the bathing-ghats of the Gungaputra. Men and women were coming and going in numbers, for it was the hour when devoutly-disposed persons resort to the banks of the sacred stream, but it was not upon them that Radha's eyes rested. The darkness was setting in fast about Walesbyganj, but she could see the Subadar's horses being walked up and down the green turf before the gate, and she knew well that Afzul and Agha were seated under the shadow of the archway, watching the movements of their four-footed favourites.

"If it were *he* that was coming here how differently I would feel!" she sighed, as she strained her eyes in the twilight towards Walesbyganj. "I cannot see him at a distance, but my heart is like to leap from my side, and my limbs grow feeble as a child's; and now, when he who in a few weeks is to claim all my life, all my affection, is at the door, my veins are as slow and steady as if I were about to receive my father."

And Radha held one arm high above her head, while she felt her pulse with the other hand, and lingered for an instant in that attitude as if she knew how well it became her. In truth she was a beautiful being; but hers was a cold, hard, and statuesque beauty—in nothing melting, in nothing woman-like.

"I might go away with him, as he entreats me—

might join his faith—what is faith to me?—and we might live in love all the rest of our days. But the Lahories shall never say that I was the first woman of their house that brought shame upon them. No; if I thought that I had not strength enough to save myself, I should leap from the heights of Kali's pagoda, and die a stainless virgin in the sacred stream. But I am strong—ay, strong above my sex; yet I am sorry for him, for I think he loves me well."

Her reverie was here interrupted by Sukheena, who came rushing in with her breath in her breast. "They are coming, Radha! they are coming! Your bridegroom and Bejoy, the *ghatak*. They were at the door as I came in, and he will be here in a minute. Sit down, quick, upon this cushion, throw this veil over your head and face, let the light fall fuller upon you, and—there now, you are a bride for an emperor."

"Peace, silly chatterer," said Radha, calmly; "go and stand by the door, and when he comes in you will wait in the outer room."

In another instant Krishna was in the anteroom, and Bejoy, the *ghatak*, having pointed out the *zenana* door, disappeared as fast as possible, for he felt serious misgivings that he was lending himself to a highly indecorous and "unprofessional" usage. Krishna paused a minute irresolutely, until beckoned by the waiting-woman to advance; the heavy curtain was held aside; he entered, and found himself standing alone in the presence of the woman he loved.

Although Krishna had for years longed for such an opportunity of declaring his passion, his courage failed him now that he was brought to the point. He glanced nervously at the shrouded figure, sitting motionless in the middle of the floor; he felt that two bright eyes were curiously fixed upon him from beneath the thin covering; he looked round about the room to see that they were quite alone; and he essayed to speak, but his mouth refused utterance. Where now were all the tender speeches, all the love-conceits, all the erotic verses, of which his mind had been pining to be delivered for a week past? Had his life depended upon the effort, he could not have recalled one of them at that moment; but somehow or other the melancholy remembrance of his unlucky wife, Chakwi, took the foremost hold upon his imagination.

"Radha!" he stammered at last, "my own love, I have come—that is, howhappy I am to be permitted —I mean, can you pardon my intruding thus into your presence?"

But the veiled figure on the cushions never moved.

"O Radha!" he continued, approaching closer, "you cannot know how I have loved you all those long, weary years, how I have cherished you in my heart, how I have yearned for an opportunity of declaring my passion. My love has so long been hidden in the secret places of my heart, that I seem guilty to myself when I dare to publish it even to you. Will you not say

something to me, beauteous; will you not tell me at least that you pardon my boldness?"

Slowly Radha put back the veil over her shoulders, and turned her face full upon her lover. "You love me, then," she said; "you do love me?"

Krishna was dazzled and confused, as if a full flood of sunshine had suddenly been flashed into his eyes. "Love you?" he cried; "ah, if it depended upon my lips, you could never know how I adore you, for they tremble to be thought insincere. But it shall be the sole labour of my life to convince you how deep and unalterable is my devotion. I shall study to anticipate your slightest wish, serve you like a slave on bended knees, court you as fondly as an hour-old lover to the latest day of our wedded life, and shield you from every care that could cast a shade over that faultless face. 'Tis thus that I would prove my love; say, Radha, whether I may dare to hope?"

But Radha said nothing; she only smiled a cold, glassy smile, and turned her eyes inquiringly upon Krishna.

"Much as I adore you, I would never have dared to ask you for my wife," resumed he, "had I not thought that your tender heart pitied my passion. You remember that night when you launched the love-tapers? It was then hope first dawned upon me. And when you flung me that garland"—here Radha's eyes opened wider, but the movement was so slight as

to be almost imperceptible—"when you flung me that garland, I felt, God help me! as if there was nothing in heaven or in earth that I would not sacrifice to win your favour. See, I have it yet; since it fell from your fair hand it has never for an hour been absent from my bosom;" and Krishna drew forth from his breast the chaplet, withered and fast crumbling into decay.

"*Chi, chi!*" (fie, fie!) said Radha, taking the flowers from him, and throwing them aside; "but they are faded and crumpled like dry grass. You shall have other flowers."

Not sorry, perhaps, to have an excuse for showing off her stately figure to the best advantage, Radha rose and crossed the room to a niche where a vase of freshly-gathered blossoms was standing. Selecting a half-blown rosebud, she turned round and handed it to Krishna. "There," she said; "that is fresher, and will be more easily carried. Let it speak to you for me of my heart."

Krishna pressed the flower rapturously to his lips. "I ask no more," he said, gently stealing an arm round the maiden's waist; "if pure affection, and a life's devotion, can warm even a half-liking to the fulness of love, I shall not despair of one day winning your whole heart."

He led Radha back to her seat, and placing himself by her side, he pressed her closely to his breast, and

laid his cheek against hers, marvelling all the while at his own temerity. The blood was coursing wildly through his veins, his heart was like to burst from his bosom. Thoughts were shooting to and fro in his brain, defying all his efforts to express them; and his soul was drunk with the delirium of love. A soft cheek rested against his own, the perfume of her breath was wafted about his face, her locks brushed his neck, and his arm clasped her body in a tight embrace. Radha submitted to these demonstrations with well-bred passiveness, having first assured herself by a quick glance that her robe was decorously and becomingly arranged, and that her hair would not be disordered by Krishna's embrace. But if the young man had laid his hand upon her heart, he would have found that organ beating with all the steadiness and regularity of a piece of mechanism.

However quickly the time flew by to Krishna, it would be tedious enough for us to follow the interview to its close, and to narrate how the poor youth poured out all the treasures of his affection before his haughty mistress. Now in spasmodic silence, now in a poetical burst of feeling, kissing at one time her red lips, at another her brown ringlets—he gave way to the pent-up passion of years; but his emotion excited no response from Radha. She submitted to his embraces with graceful coyness; she listened to his tender words with an air of dreamy pleasure: when he praised her

beauty she drooped her eyes because she knew how exquisitely her lashes were pencilled; and she heaved a half-audible sigh as he repeated some of the ardent verses into which he had woven her name. But we will not dwell upon a scene so disagreeable—the old, old story of "a fool and a woman;" nor yet will we essay to render Krishna's erotics into the English tongue. Let us rather say, with melancholy Jaques, "Nay, then, God be wi' you, an you talk in blank verse."

The sound of a slight tapping at length came from the outer apartment, and Sukheena was presently heard greeting Bejoy, the *ghatak*, in designedly loud tones. Krishna, printing a farewell kiss upon Radha's cheek, sprang to his feet, and stood looking towards the door in blushing confusion, while Radha also arose, placid as a statue of Pallas, and went forward to the *pardah* (screen) that marked the commencement of the female apartments.

"The *ghatak* awaits you, Baboo," said Sukheena, putting her head in, "and you must come forth directly."

"Farewell, then, loveliest," whispered Krishna; "and when next we meet, it will be not to part until death divide us. I go, but I leave my heart behind me. O Radha! if you would only tell me that I bear yours along with me."

She looked up in his face with a quiet smile, and transfixed him with a glance of her bright eyes. Krish-

na again threw his arms around her, and pressed his lips to her until both had to draw their breaths. "Radha," he said suddenly, looking her full in the face, "if aught were to befall you I should die. For your sake I would mount the pile and be *suttee*."

"Nay, but you must not think such ill-omened thoughts," she answered, with a little laugh; and withdrawing herself from his embrace, she salaamed gaily with her hand, and said, "Farewell, Krishna! farewell, my husband!"

It is unlikely that Krishna would have been able to refrain from again clasping her in his arms, had the impatient Sukheena not drawn aside the screen to allow him egress. He went out, not forgetting to slip a ten-rupee note into the hands of the attendant, and joined Bejoy, who was walking uneasily up and down in the corridor.

"Umph!" said the match-maker, taking a critical survey of his client from head to foot; "are you pleased with your bargain, now that you have seen her? I hope no ill will come of it, but it seems to me a sacrilegious way of making a marriage."

"Peace, good Bejoy," returned Krishna, as they descended the stairs; "and believe that I shall not forget how much my happiness is due to your kindly efforts. She is, indeed, all that you have said, and much more beautiful and loving than tongue can tell. The sooner you can hasten on the marriage now, the more grateful I shall be."

"Oh, we shall soon get things ready, never fear," returned Bejoy; "but you must keep back, Baboo, until I have seen that there are no spies about the village green to *tom-tom* tales of our visit over Dhupnagar. What a godsend it would be to the *ghataks* of Gapshapganj and Bhutpore if they should hear that I had connived at such an irregular practice! Why, there would not be a *chokhra* (boy) in the valley who would not think that he had a right to make his own love. Why, as good to us allow our sons and daughters to make up their own matches altogether, after the scandalous Christian fashion! The valley would soon be a hotbed of iniquity at that rate."

Going forth into the night, Bejoy cautiously reconnoitred the road between the house of Lahory and the temple gate, and satisfied that there were no idlers about, he silently beckoned to Krishna to follow him. Slipping a handsome gratuity into the match-maker's hand—which Bejoy mentally vowed to spend in the service of religion, that no calamity might overtake him for his "unprofessional" conduct—Krishna went his own way across the green. But he could not then go into the house and sit down in the dreary quietness of his own room. He must relieve his excitement by exercise in the cool night air, and walk away the impatient longings that racked his heart. So when Bejoy was out of sight, he turned and dashed down the road towards the river, never pausing until he had reached the Gungaputra. He then leaned himself against a

broken pillar of the ruined bathing-place, and tried to collect his thoughts.

Down by the Gungaputra everything was still as the grave. The dark flood rolled past as silently as if its waters had been muffled, and hardly emitted a gurgle as the tide welled up and down by the edge of the bank. Far up the river a corpse-fire was burning low and fitfully, but sometimes starting up into a blaze and casting a sullen flush athwart the stream, as fresh fuel was added to the pyre. There was not a soul to be seen or heard, not even a mad devotee squatting about the bathing-ghat, and measuring the night-watches by his prayers. Krishna sat down on a step, and leaned his throbbing head upon his hands.

"So good, and so pure, and so loving," murmured he; "even her beauty pales before the sweetness of her manners and the tenderness of her heart. What a fool she must have thought me to rant and rave like a man in the bazaar, vowing his heart to the fishwoman his neighbour; and to spout my fustian poetry to one whose soul is the very essence of poetry itself! And yet how gently, how patiently she bore with my tediousness! She is like the moon-gem, which absorbs all the passionate heat of the god * of night, and returns it in dew, pure and cool as a drop of the Ganges when it trickles from the fountains of everlasting night. How

* Note that among the Hindoos the moon is a male deity, a white-faced god driving a team of ten horses. For the moon-gem (*chandra-kanta*) see Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*, and Dr H. H. Wilson's comments.

well coldness becomes her, shadowing forth as it does her innate purity! and yet I had not cared though she had shown more warmth in returning my caresses. Fool that I am! I would have every one to love me with such a dog's love as that of poor Chakwi. Poor Chakwi! I must get the matter broken to her as soon as possible; I wonder how she will bear it? But Chakwi has one of those shallow superficial natures that cannot retain deep feeling; a good cry in her own room and she will soon find something else to comfort herself with. Yes, Chakwi is the only alloy in my cup of happiness. Ay, but I am forgetting; there are those meddlesome, sophistical speculators in Calcutta who will abuse me as a murderer, and worse, because I have seen the error of my ways. Well, let them say what they like. I am not the first man that has changed his opinions and rechanged them again. It matters nothing to me though the 'Cossitollah Reflector' should write me down by the column; its sneers will not take a pice from my pocket, nor will any one in the valley think less of me because I have had courage enough to recant my boyish errors. Yes, I have done all with an honest purpose, and my conscience is clear; but yet I wish that hybrid Hindoo, who calls himself Mr Roy, would not dog my steps. A mind like his is incapable of estimating the motives that have actuated my conduct, far less of sympathising with the difficult position in which I have been placed. Adorable Radha! how slowly the minutes will glide

by until we are united! and then what bliss! such bliss as I fear to imagine, lest the jealousy of the gods should be stirred up at seeing a mortal so happy."

In this fashion Krishna mused far into the night, until the corpse-fire flickered and went out, and the cold stars came forth and lit up the black bosom of the Gungaputra with their feeble reflections.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES.

When the legitimate nine days—to which three days of grace must be added in the case of Bengalee gossips—had run their course, the betrothal of Krishna and Radha ceased to command the exclusive attention of the Dhupnagar villagers, although the coming marriage came in very handily to fill up a gap in conversation. As yet the best authorities could not say with certainty when the ceremony would take place; but it was obvious to all that a wedding upon so large a scale as Kristo proposed to hold, could not be prepared in a day's time. Gangooly professed himself to be in a position to state that all obstacles to the union had been finally removed, that Kristo and Ramanath were at one in everything, and that Radha was as fond as Krishna was fain. Prosunno, the lawyer, had dropped several broad hints that Kristo might well be satisfied with the match, since it would not cost him so much as a pice; but this, as the headman said, need not be

believed as implicitly as the Vishnu Purana; for since Prosunno had won the great case of Kristo Dass Lahory *v.* Gopal Ryot for his clients, there had been little goodwill between the Baboo and the pleader; and, indeed, Tukht Singh, the Baboo's *lattial* (club-man) had been seen in the bazaar with a heavy bludgeon making anxious inquiries regarding the lawyer's whereabouts. Prosunno wished nothing better, he said, than so sufficient a cause of action against the Baboo; but reflection had probably suggested the difficulty of recovering damages from so penniless a person, and Prosunno had for some time past kept himself well indoors. The community, meanwhile, suffered little from the loss of his society, and Gangooly, the headman, had made a great joke about paying Tukht Singh, at the village expense, to patrol the lane opposite the pleader's door. Of course everybody laughed heartily at the headman's wit as long as he was present, and so soon as his back was turned began to quote scripture regarding the ultimate destiny of those who allowed themselves to rejoice in the misfortunes of others.

About this time, too, the villagers were greatly exercised by the ongoings of the Ghatghar Rajah. Shama Churn, the grain-dealer, whose wife's cousin's husband was the favourite orderly of Eversley Sahib Bahadoor, had heard that the Rajah was two collections behind with his land revenue, and that Eversley Sahib had sworn over the "Bengal Regulations"—an oath which no Englishma never ventured to break—that if

all arrears were not paid up before the early rains, the estate would be put up to auction in the Bhutpore cutcherry. The headman, who felt rather jealous of any official information that came through a channel other than himself, gravely rebuked Shama Churn for his trustlessness, and exhorted the grain-seller to take a pattern from him, Gangooly, who had known all about the matter for the last three months, but had never mentioned it to mortal man until that moment. But for all his difficulties, his Highness had not abated his extravagance a whit. Dwarkanath, the schoolmaster, had been credibly informed that two young damsels of surpassing loveliness from the cold country of Kashmere had just been added to the Ghatghar domestic circle; and Brijo, his son, volunteered the information that one day on the Ghatghar road a half-opened palanquin had passed him, and that he had seen a little hand close the curtains; a hand smaller and whiter than any maiden's hand in the valley. Against this as a fact the headman had nothing to say, but he seriously cautioned Brijo that his feet had better touch fire than his eyes rest upon female charms that did not belong to him; and solemnly predicted that the young man would bring his father to shame if he did not soon abandon his licentious habits. To this Brijo, who was really a well-behaved youth, would have returned an angry retort; but the other seniors, who felt that their own dignity was concerned in the maintenance of authority, and the suppression of youthful presump-

tion, took Gangooly's part. And the conference was closed by a solemn admonition from the headman to avoid all tattling and tale-bearing, and more especially to restrain their tongues from interfering in the affairs of their betters.

Gangooly's reputation as a source of information would have been seriously endangered about this time but for the opportune marriage of his son Gopal. The sealed packet had been placed in Three Shells' hands, and the loan duly advanced. Moreover, Jotee Lall of Gapshapganj had accepted the bullocks as a pledge, and Bullal Sen, the Bhutporę usurer, had advanced fully half the probable value of next year's crops; so that the headman had the wherewithal to marry his son in a style calculated to enhance the family dignity. And that the wedding was a great success, even Prosunno the lawyer, and Protap the accountant, who were not invited, could not deny. The whole street of Dhupnagar was lighted with cressets from one end to the other; ten men with silver staves preceded the bridegroom's litter; three elephants, and the broken-winded camel of Peeroo, the potter, followed in the procession; and the train of guests and torch-bearers was nearly a quarter of a mile in length. The most censorious could not shut their eyes to that procession, and say that Gangooly had failed in his duty to his family. That the marriage-feast was worthy of the procession, the death of one mendicant Brahmin from repletion, and the serious illness of two others

from the same cause, were sufficient proofs. Then Gangooly had been treated with great consideration by the village magnates. Ramanath and his son had both sent persents to the bridegroom, as well as polite excuses for their not being present; and Kristo Baboo had redeemed his promise of looking in to see the *nâtch* (dancing), upon condition that he was not to be asked to eat or smoke with any of the guests. As Three Shells had so much to do with providing the entertainment, Gangooly felt that he could not well be left out; and the money-lender attended duly, and did ample justice to the feast, although his presence there had been like to turn the stomach of not a few Brahmins who could not bring themselves to believe in his claims to caste. But there were not many of Gangooly's guests that could afford to quarrel with Three Shells about a mouthful or two of rice or the whiff of a hookha.

Kristo Baboo was none the less ready to honour Gangooly's house with his presence because he knew that the money-lender was among the invited. Although the time was at hand when the Baboo must disburse money for the bridal preparations, Three Shells had not yet put him in possession of the promised loan. Kristo had several times sent urgent requests for the money, but either Three Shells had been from home, or the mahajan prayed the Baboo's patience until a reference upon the subject could be made to his honoured correspondent, Banksi Lall of Barra Bazaar in

Calcutta; until Kristo could not help feeling that he was being put off for some purpose or another. After the daring familiarities with which the money-lender had lately treated him, Kristo felt that he could not undergo another private interview; but the presence of a public assembly would surely, he thought, restrain Three Shells' impertinences within proper bounds. So Kristo went to Gopal's bridal late at night, when the feasting was over, and the dancing was begun, fully as much for the purpose of having a quiet talk with Three Shells as of paying respect to the headman's family.

Three Shells stood silently by until Kristo had been installed in the seat of honour, and while the more respectable guests were crowding round to compliment the great man; but though he was apparently absorbed in watching the dancing-girls, the money-lender's little eyes did not fail to catch the anxious glances which Kristo constantly threw in his direction. At length, when a burst of applause saluted a more than ordinary lascivious attitude into which Nathi, the Rajah of Ghatghar's favourite dancer, had thrown herself, and all pressed anxiously forward to look on, Three Shells seized the opportunity to glide quietly up to the Baboo's seat.

"Ah, who could have expected to see your honour here?" he said, with a fawning air, as he bent almost to the ground in saluting the Baboo. "I have been looking all around for some place in which to hide my black face from your presence."

"It is not needful, worthy Three Shells," responded

Kristo, condescendingly; "I am always well pleased to meet you. I had heard of your noble gift to the temple, and I hope the gods will return it to you an hundred-fold. Dhupnagar ought to be proud of so liberal a resident."

"Nay, it is you who are holy; I am but a poor vile wretch, to whom it is even too much honour that my gift should find a refuge in the Linga's temple," snuffled Three Shells. "But can your honour pardon me for not having waited upon you before this time?"

"Hem!" said Kristo, as he looked suspiciously towards the long ears of Dwarkanath, the schoolmaster, the rigid inclination of which towards the speakers was hardly in keeping with the affected direction of the pundit's eyes. "I daresay you could not conveniently —give—come sooner."

"The reason was," said Three Shells, sinking his voice, "that my correspondent, Banksi Lall of Barra Bazaar, had never given me an answer about the money, and until I heard from him it was impossible for me to do anything. What sayeth the Panchatantra? 'That which is possible may be done, but that which is impracticable can never be accomplished.' So as I could not give you money of my own, I had even to take the time from another."

"Of course, of course," returned Kristo, in a half-whisper; "but you see, Three Shells, I must have the money at once. Would it oil the wheels if I were to send a message from myself to this Banksi Lall,

and promise him a handsome *bakshish* for the obligement?"

"No need, Baboo," answered Three Shells, hastily; "he has this day sent me his kind permission to accommodate you. Besides, Banksi Lall will never do business with any one himself. He is a strange character, but so rich and so liberal. I have known him lend lakhs of rupees at not a pice more than ten per cent. Ah, a most generous person."

"And he will let me have the money upon a three months' note?" said Kristo.

"He said not so," replied Three Shells, drily; "but you may have it as a loan at twenty per cent, repayable upon demand. And really I could not have made a better bargain for you. The interest of money is as a king's ransom just now."

"Well, if I must, I must; but you will have to stand between me and this Banksi Lall if he wants his money before my daughter's marriage can take place," said Kristo; "and you will let me have the cash to-morrow, will you?"

"Certainly, Baboo," responded the money-lender. "I will bring you the money and the papers about sundown. Ah, I cannot tell you how happy I have been since I heard of this marriage. If so great an honour could be permitted to one so lowly as myself, I should like to offer a small present to the bride—a poor string of Lanka (Ceylon) pearls—a mere trifle, but offered by one that wishes her utmost happiness."

"Nay, nay, Three Shells," interrupted Kristo; "my daughter receives no presents but from her future husband. Keep the pearls; or, better far, find out some other woman to give them to. Why, a man with your wealth might marry into the best families of the valley. I only wish I had another daughter to bestow on you."

"Why jest with me thus?" said Three Shells, with affected meekness; "you know that you are to me as a king to a beggar. It is only your great goodness that has emboldened me to lift up my eyes in your presence. And the poor mahajan is grateful, sincerely grateful," and to prove his gratitude the money-lender stretched out his hand to pat the Baboo on the shoulder.

"Hush!" said Kristo, avoiding the contact; "see how that old crow of a schoolmaster is watching us, like a cobra listening to a piper! Peace be with you Three Shells, and forget not the morrow."

And summoning Gangooly to his side, the Baboo intimated his intention of departing, and quitted the house amid the reverences of the wedding guests. Three Shells, among others, attended him to the door, salaaming almost to the ground; and the money-lender did not return to the headman's entertainment.

"Kristo shall escort me to the door with tenfold more ceremony, and that before long, too," chuckled the mahajan to himself, as he made his way home through the lighted streets. "Look at him there with a band of torch-bearers and lackeys sufficient to light

home the Deputy of a province, while poor Three Shells is left to make his way with the aid of his two eyes. I shall treat Kristo with all reasonable kindness when he is my father-in-law, but he is not going to squander my money to feed his beggarly pride. I hope I shall find Panchoo and his comrade sober, for I shall have a stiff job to drill them for their work to-morrow night. It is the most ticklish business they have undertaken yet; but there can't be much danger—these blessed Sonthalis are well able to bear the blame."

Next day Three Shells waited upon the Baboo and told down ten thousand rupees in good silver, fresh from the Calcutta mint, deducting two thousand on account of interest. Against this diminution Kristo pleaded so pitifully, that Three Shells was moved to remit the money, promising to stand between Kristo and Banksi Lall of Barra Bazaar, provided the Baboo granted him a three months' bill for three thousand rupees. To this demand Kristo had no alternative but to consent, and the documents were duly signed and made over to the mahajan. It was in vain that Kristo prayed the mahajan to put a term to his bond to Banksi Lall. Obliging as he professed himself to be whenever his own interest was concerned, Three Shells became as hard as flint when Banksi Lall's affairs came in question. So Kristo was obliged to put his name upon the paper which rendered him liable to pay a thousand pounds sterling upon presentation.

"It is a relief to me to get these rupees out of my hands," said Three Shells, as Kristo drew the money towards him; "for a lone man like me is not safe with such sums about my house, while so many robbers are plundering the country. I heard from a pilgrim the other day that the Sonthal *dakaits* (robbers) have again been seen below the passes."

"Let them come," said Kristo, as he gathered up the last coins into a bag, "they shan't take a pice of my money. I wish I could say as much of the tax-gatherers and gentlemen of your profession; they are the worst *dakaits* I fall in with. Look here," he added, as he opened a rickety safe, built into the wall of his sitting-room, "it would take a clever thief to steal anything from under a neat English Burma (Brahma) lock like this;" and Kristo, by dint of main strength, slid a jingling bolt backwards and forwards. "I bought this safe in Calcutta twenty years ago; the only pity is that I have had so little use for it."

"But suppose you were to lose the key," said Three Shells, as the Baboo locked the safe, "what would you do?"

"Why, what would it matter?" cried Kristo; "I lost the key before, and got Karma, the blacksmith, to make me another. I caused him to prepare three or four while he was about the job, and can get one of them at any time."

"Indeed!" said Three Shells, quietly; "I did not

know Karma had been so handy. I shall employ him to mend some old locks of my own."

Three Shells soon after took his leave, and was dismissed with little consideration; for now that Kristo had the money, his native arrogance rose again to the offensive pitch. But Three Shells was at that moment so elated, that he did not feel the Baboo's uncourteousness.

"Holy mother Kali," said he to himself, "how everything is working into my hands! That descendant of jackasses has removed the only difficulty that stood in my way. I shall give a hundred rupees in silver to the temple of Kali at Bhutpore the first time I enter that town, else may the goddess lay her hand heavily upon me." In the course of that afternoon, Three Shells, mindful of Kristo's recommendation of the blacksmith, sent for Karma, and ordered the artisan to bring a number of keys with him that he might fit the lock of a cash-box whose key had gone amissing. Karma came, bringing with him among others the keys made for Kristo, which the blacksmith pointed out with no little pride. Three Shells handled them for a few minutes while Karma was selecting one for the cash-box, praised the man's skill in his craft, handed them back to him again, and paid him for the key and for his trouble in fitting it. Having done so much business the money-lender was naturally tired, and telling his misshapen clerk that he did not wish to be disturbed more that afternoon,

retired to his own apartment, and was heard of the quick-eared Gopul hammering away at the secret places where he kept his money; at least so that sharp-witted lad conjectured the noise to indicate. And in the evening he sent a message to Gangooly, the village headman, to come and talk with him; and although the business related to the merest trifle—the renewing of an old bond which could have been effected in five minutes—Three Shells detained the headman with his talk until morning had begun to lighten in the east. Gangooly would fain have gone home to bed, for he had not yet recovered the fatigue of his son's marriage, but Three Shells was so jocular and pleasant, and pressed him so much to stay, that the headman could not civilly get away. The sun was already up when Gangooly at length got free from the mahajan's dwelling.

Having counted his money again for safety's sake, Kristo Baboo thought fit in the cool of the evening to pay his devotions to the Linga of Dhupnagar. He now began to feel a feverish anxiety lest something should come to interfere with the marriage project, and he himself should be left to the mercy of Banksi Lall of Barra Bazaar, of whom he felt an ominous dread, in spite of the mahajan's encomiums. So he went across to the temple under pretence of paying his devotions to the idol, but in reality to have a talk with Ramanath, and to urge that an early day should be fixed for the wedding. He found Ramanath as anxious for haste as himself. The good priest felt

that he would have no security until his son was once more fairly linked to Hindooism by means of an orthodox marriage. That "clothed monkey" from Calcutta, as Ramanath designated Mr Romesh Chunder Roy, was still hovering about the place, and if he should succeed in getting the ear of Krishna, there was no saying what mischief he might make. So both the parents resolved that the marriage should take place on the day of the coming month that Bejoy the *ghatak* should select as the most propitious; for, as they both knew quite well, no wife was ever faithful to vows pledged in the month of Cheth (March), and they would have to wait for other nine months before they found a season so lucky for matrimony as Phalgun (February).

"And what about the first wife? How does she take with the marriage?" asked Kristo, as the priest passed the hookha to him, while they sat together under the temple-porch in the twilight.

"Alas, poor thing!" said Ramanath, hanging his head, "I fear it is biting deeply into her poor heart. When I told her—and I would have gladly given a hundred rupees to have been spared the duty—the poor child bore up right bravely and said, although she was like to choke upon the words, that whatever would make her husband happy would make her happy also; but her eyes have been red with tears ever since, and her cheeks are hollow and sunken. Ah, neighbour! your daughter may be a peerless

beauty, as every one says she is, but she cannot have a kinder heart than my poor Chakwi."

"I daresay not," said Kristo, carelessly; "but it is strange how some women will take on. I don't think my wife would have cared a plaintain-paring though I had brought other twenty women into the house. However, I hope the girls will agree together and be pleasant, for Krishna's sake. If they don't, he should beat both; it is always the best plan in such cases."

Ramanath sighed, but said nothing, and the hour of evening worship shortly afterwards broke up the conference. Kristo returned, ate a hearty supper, smoked steadily for two hours, and then went to bed with an easier mind than he had known for many a day. But considering the state of his stomach, the reader will not be surprised to hear that his sleep was haunted by visions of Banksi Lall of Barra Bazaar in the shape of an English *padre* (missionary), who gave Kristo the choice of three evils—either to give Banksi his daughter in marriage, repay him the ten thousand rupees, or take a draught from a brandy-bottle which Banksi produced from the tail-pockets of his coat. Failing to induce Kristo to accept any of these propositions, Banksi had squatted himself upon the Baboo's breast and was endeavouring to force a piece of beefsteak down his throat, when Kristo was wakened by the sound of his own outcries. It took some time to convince him that it was broad

daylight, and that the relish of unclean meat in his mouth was mere imagination.

When he had bathed and breakfasted, Kristo resolved to begin work in earnest. He would set about the marriage preparations that very day, and first and foremost he would go into the bazaar and bargain with Ram Lall about the oil for the illuminations. Since the Dipty had been disappointed in his suit, the old man would drive a hard bargain, Kristo did not doubt; and he would have to pay the small account which the oilman had standing against him. So Kristo went away to the safe to take out a handful of rupees, and with some trouble opened the Brahma lock. As the door fell back, the Baboo started, shaded his eyes with his hands, stood for a few minutes staring stupidly before him, and then fell over with a heavy thud on the floor. The safe was perfectly empty.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

POST EQUITEM ATRA CURA.

A FEW days after the disappearance of Kristo's money, an express from Mr Eversley, the magistrate of the Gungaputra district, came trotting up to the gate of Walesbyganj, where Agha was sitting basking in the evening sunshine, and delivered to the Khyberee a letter for the Subadar. Agha opened his eyes wide with surprise, asked the messenger what the note was about, and on the man protesting his utter ignorance of its import, slowly sought his master's presence. Somehow the trooper felt a presentiment that mischief was brewing for Afzul, and he would gladly have taken counsel with him before submitting the letter to the Subadar; but Afzul had business of his own on hand that evening, having followed Sukheena down to the river-bank in the hope of overcoming her scruples about making an assignation for him with her mistress. So there was nothing left for Agha but to carry in the letter to Shamsuddeen, which he accordingly did, after

he had curiously scanned the outside of the envelope, had held it up between him and the light, and had weighed it carefully upon the tips of his fingers, but all without being able to form any idea of the contents.

Shamsuddeen was sitting in his own room when the trooper entered, endeavouring, spectacles on nose, to spell his way through an illuminated copy of Mir Ismail's "Futteh-ul-Sham," a chronicle of the early conquests made by the Faithful in Syria. The apartment was furnished in strict accordance with Shamsuddeen's tastes. Vases of freshly-culled flowers stood in every niche and in every corner, contrasting oddly enough with the cavalry trappings and articles of armour that adorned the walls. Unlike most rooms in native houses, there was a fireplace with an English grate; the mantelpiece being composed of a black slab of polished stone from some ruined Mussulman mosque, bearing a holy text from the Koran upon its front, and supported by two pillars of indisputably Hindoo workmanship, the wreck of some idolatrous shrine. Above the fireplace hung a water-colour drawing of the late Colonel Walesby, who was depicted as sitting upon horseback, and pointing with his sword to the watch-fires of an Afghan encampment burning luridly in the background. For this work of art, the *chef d'œuvre* of Lieutenant Lymner Sahib, the same who was shot on the Pultunpore parade-ground in the Mutiny year, Shamsuddeen felt a reverence which was almost idolatrous, and which no comments upon the imperfect

perspective, the preternatural length of the charger's body, or obliquity which the artist had bestowed upon the commandant's eyesight, could in the least diminish. Among other mementos of his military career were the silver-mounted pistols presented to him by Sir George Blitzen Sahib, as an acknowledgment of Shamsuddeen's having rescued his Excellency's valet from a band of the enemy's troopers on the field of Sobraon — it was said that Sir George would rather have lost the Adjutant-general than M. Capille; the saddle that had borne him through Maharajpore, with the holsters ragged from Rajpoot bullets; the stall-collar of his favourite charger, Akbar, whose leg was broken at Agra through the carelessness of a vile son of a burnt Hindoo father—the mention of this was one of the few occasions on which Shamsuddeen departed from his usual propriety of speech; and some score of sabres, pistols, spears, and shields which he had either worn or won in the course of his long campaigning. When Agha entered, the Subadar set down his book with a sigh of relief, although he affected to mark his place by inserting his spectacles within the volume.

"Well, Agha," said he, returning the Khyberee's stiff, military salute, "what brings you here? All well in the garrison?"

"A *khurecta* (communication) from the Magistrate Sahib Bahadoor, brought by an express messenger. Shall I read it for you, Subadar Sahib?"

Shamsuddeen, in his listless moods, not unfrequently

made use of the Khyberee as his secretary; for to please the Subadar, Agha had made considerable progress in reading and writing while with the regiment.

"The Magistrate Sahib Eversley—may he live for a thousand years!" said Shamsuddeen, briskening up with astonishment, and taking out his spectacles from the "Conquest of Syria." "Nay, but I will read his letter myself. The writing of so honourable a gentleman should be as pleasant to read as a General Order."

Agha handed his master the letter, and the old man took it tenderly in his hand, and turned it curiously over and over before he broke open the seal. Shamsuddeen had not many correspondents among the *Sahib log* (Englishmen), and the receipt of an epistle from a man in Mr Eversley's station was an event of no little importance in his quiet life. At length he tore up the envelope and read the letter slowly over. It was written in Hindoostani, a language which Mr Eversley could construe with more elegance and grammar than his mother English; and after the usual compliments, ran somewhat as follows: "Evil accounts of your son have caused us much concern. For some time we have learned that he has been consorting with drunkards and dicers, and frequenting the company of loose and lewd females. We grieved to hear such words of his father's son; but we had hoped that your good example, and his own better judgment, would wean him from wickedness. But we are now informed that he has entered upon a criminal career, which must soon

end in his own ruin, and in disgrace to all connected with him. We cannot say how soon it may be our duty to interfere, but we would fain talk with you about him, as one friend with another. You are therefore entreated, for your son's sake, to come to our presence as soon as you conveniently can. Receive our wishes for your welfare, and know our goodwill towards you and your family," &c.

Shamsuddeen read the letter twice over before he looked up, but his face betrayed no sign of the emotion which its contents excited. He had long weakly allowed himself to be overcome by trifles, but when a serious calamity confronted him he stood up to it as bravely as ever he had faced Afghan or Sikh in the days of his prime. He paused for a few minutes after he had mastered the Magistrate's letter, that he might strengthen himself for the coming trial.

"Order Sultan to be saddled immediately," said the old man, in a low commanding voice; "and bid a bearer get me my newest uniform. Make ready your own horse, for you will ride with me."

"But, Subadar Sahib," cried Agha, looking the picture of utter amazement, "what can be the matter? And I don't believe the devil himself would sit that Sultan horse just now."

"Silence, fellow! and do my bidding. Are my orders to be criticised by a dog like you? Another word, and salt of mine never crosses your lips again."

Agha shrugged his shoulders, saluted, and left the

room without another word. He saw that it was not the old pensioner, but Shamsuddeen Khan, the Subadar of Walesby's Horse, that he had to do with now, and that it would be dangerous to bandy words with him in his present humour.

"Where, in Eblis' name, is the Child?" snarled Agha to himself; "away upon some raking ramble, I warrant ye! I'm sure this uproar has something to do with him, for nothing else would have thus sent the Subadar to the saddle."

So ordering out the horses, Agha went and put on his faded old uniform, with its rusting buttons and ragged facings; and hardly had he finished his toilet when his master came out from the house. Agha looked in wonder at the old man, as he walked forth erect as an arrow, his long cavalry sabre in his hand, and looking as stout and determined as he had done that night when Walesby's Horse was like to mutiny at Pultunpore, and he had pistoled the ringleader with his own hand. Agha had meant to remonstrate with his master for venturing upon a rough, mouthless, vicious brute like Sultan; but the words died away as he noticed the cast of his master's countenance.

"He'd back a devil from the lowest depths of hell, when he has got that look on his face," inwardly ejaculated the trooper; "so look to yourself, Sultan Sahib."

The Subadar soon showed the justice of Agha's observation. Hardly had Sultan begun to kick and

plunge, and to arch his back for "bucking," than Shamsuddeen buried his spurs in the brute's sides, while at the same time he pulled the horse back with such a firm jerk as to nearly throw him upon his haunches. Long before the riders had passed the bazaar of Dhupnagar, Sultan had come to a perfect understanding of the mutual conditions upon which the rest of the journey was to be performed, and he thenceforth honourably refrained from exhibiting any personal bias in the matter. As Agha had guessed, the Subadar followed the Bhutpore road; and so unsparingly did he apply the spur to Sultan, that in a couple of hours the two pulled up before the large villa-like mansion that served as an official residence for the Magistrate of the Gungaputra district.

Mr Eversley was sitting at his solitary dinner in no very equable frame of mind. The magistrate was a consistent bachelor. When a young writer, serving as deputy-assistant secretary in the Toshakhana office, Eversley had been much smitten by the graceful figure and daring horsewomanship of Miss Josephine Killigrew, daughter of the eminent house of M'Wallop, Killigrew, & Flynn, in Clive Street, and had even accompanied that young lady to three successive meetings of the Calcutta Hunt in the capacity of an accepted lover. But when Sir Dander Byles, the puisne justice of the High Court, proposed to Mr Killigrew for his daughter's hand—he had marked the maiden among other aristocratic belles in his court during the

trial of the famous *crim. con.* case of Horner *v.* O'Toole, a major in the king's service—the filial Miss Josephine artfully put herself in the hands of her parent, and the young civilian received an unceremonious *jawab* (dismissal). In time Eversley had got the better of his love-fever, his recovery being greatly aided by the dowdy and woe-begone appearance of Lady Byles on the return of the happy pair from their honeymoon at Madras ; and he had ever since maintained a good-natured cynicism on the subject of the sex, and had repudiated all efforts to entrap him into matrimony. A copy of the 'Bengal Peon' divided the magistrate's attention with the microscopic preparation which on Indian tables does duty for a leg of mutton ; and it was difficult to say whether the flesh or the newspaper was harder to digest. The editor had taken for his subject the repression of crime among the rural population ; and much disagreeable emphasis was laid upon the fact that the percentage of undiscovered thefts had risen from 11.5 to 13.9 in the Gungaputra district during the last official year, while in the Lallkor district for the same period only 7.43 per cent of the robberies reported had baffled the police.

"Comment upon the above," said the editor, "would be superfluous. It is as useless to seek far-fetched excuses for the alarming increase of undetected crime in the Gungaputra district as it is to deny that the marked success of the Lallkor police is due to the energetic superintendence of the local magistrate.

We have every respect for Mr Eversley. We honour him as the high-minded representative of the class that laid the foundations of our Eastern empire—the valiant but illiterate followers of Clive—the vigorous but high-handed disciples of Wellesley and Hastings. Peace be with them! they did in their day. A new and better *régime* has dawned upon India. Strength and Force are no longer the ministers of an usurping Zeus, to bind Philanthropy in adamantine chains; but swift-winged Themis and Dike execute the behests of a paternal Jove among a free and intelligent race of subjects. If Mr Eversley cannot accommodate himself to the methods of modern administration, why should he stop the way? The Government can never allow so important a district as the Gungaputra to become a hotbed of crime, because the magistrate happens to be an amiable and inoffensive person. But we would fain hope for better things from Mr Eversley even at the eleventh hour. The oldest of us may often learn wisdom from a younger head; and if Mr Eversley would cast his eyes across the frontier of his own district he will not have far to look for a pattern. It is a high standard of excellence that we have set before the magistrate of the Gungaputra district, but let him not be discouraged; we cannot all be Muffington Prigs, but we may all strive to follow at some distance in the footsteps of that excellent administrator, that most energetic of district officers."

"Cursed, impertinent, backbiting, toadying *soor*

(pig)," commented Eversley, as he pushed the mutton savagely away. "It is that blackguard Muff. Prig himself, beyond doubt; there is no other body would say so much good of him. No, stay—it is Butterby of the Envelope Office. I know his style well enough, with these cursed classical allusions and lines out of the Latin grammar. He has got a *zidd* (spite) against me because I did not send him the return he asked for about the number of *punkah-wallahs* who had been vaccinated in the district for the last twenty years. He wanted the figures for one of his damned books. Muffington Prig indeed! If we were all to follow in his footsteps, there wouldn't be the ghost of an Englishman on this side of Suez in less than twelve months' time! *Qui hye?* Take away this cursed cast-iron mutton, and bring me something that mortal chops can masticate!"

At this juncture the *khansamah*, meekly folding his hands, whispered in his master's ear that the Subadar Sahib from Dhupnagar was without. Rising instantly from the table, the magistrate went out and gave Shamsuddeen a hearty greeting, assisting him to alight, and taking his arm inside—for, bigot as Eversley was to the "dam nigger" doctrine of Anglo-Indianism, he never withheld respect where it was due; and when he met with a native of honour and worth like Shamsuddeen, the magistrate paid him double deference to make up for his poor opinion of orientals in general. So they went inside, and Agha

was left to see their horses put up in the magistrate's stables; and when this duty was discharged he went and sat down in a quiet corner of the verandah, scorning to mingle with menial Mussulmans; while the magistrate's servants were, on their part, too proud of their master's dignity to force their society on one who rode so high a horse without stirrups.

The magistrate led the Subadar inside, and seated him in an easy-chair with many polite proffers of refreshment, all of which the old man declined. Then ensued an awkward pause, which the Subadar at last broke by respectfully thanking the magistrate for the consideration which had prompted his kind letter, and begging to be told the worst of his son's misconduct. Eversley was but a bad hand at condolence, and he bluntly told the Subadar all the evil reports that had reached him of Afzul's conduct, and how suspicion of the robberies had been attached to the young man. He had been very unwilling to believe any such thing of Afzul, whom he knew to be a brave and spirited youth, the magistrate said; but evidence had of late been laid before him which it was impossible to ignore. It was clear that the robberies were perpetrated by some one in Dhupnagar, and Afzul was known to be often abroad in the night-time. Besides, a case had been reported that same day which gave the charge a very black complexion. A large sum of money had been stolen from a person in Dhupnagar, and Afzul had been seen loitering about

the man's house on the night of the theft. The magistrate earnestly hoped that there might be some mistake, and that Afzul's innocence would be clearly established; but in the meantime he would be compelled to have the matter investigated. So he had thought it best to consult the Subadar upon the subject, knowing that he would not screen even his son from justice, and thinking that if the youth were really innocent, his father would be the counsellor most likely to aid him in showing it.

Shamsuddeen rose and made a low salaam before the magistrate. "Sahib," he said, "you are more to me than my father and mother. I am not a talker, but may Allah forget me in the day of separation if ever I forget your goodness! Afzul is my only son, but he shall pay the penalty of his fault. Only in this hear me: the Government has given me lands and wealth,—all these will I render back again if it will grant my prayer that my son shall die by the bullet like a soldier, and not by the cord like a pariah cur."

"No, no, my good old friend," cried Eversley, "there is nothing so serious. His life is in no danger; even if the worst that we suspect be true, he is only liable to a term of transportation. Now, what I want you to do is this: keep the lad in strict confinement until I come to Dhupnagar, which will be in the course of the next week, and then I can investigate the charge with less noise than in my own court. Of course, if I were

to keep close by the regular procedure, I should have him arrested at once; but I know that if you undertake to produce him, he is as safe as if he were in Bhutpore Jail, with the handcuffs on, at this very moment."

"Ay, Sahib, never fear; I will produce him alive or dead when the proper time comes. I swear it to you by the holy tombs of the martyred at Kerbela," said Shamsuddeen, slowly and with preternatural calmness.

"Enough said," replied the magistrate; "and really I hope something will turn up to explain this mysterious matter. I cannot think Afzul would stoop to so base a trade as thieving. Foolish he may have been, but no thief ever went up so straight to a tiger as I have seen him do in the jungles of Panch Pahar."

"Alas, Sahib!" said Shamsuddeen, with a sad smile, "there is no saying what the best soldiers will come to when wine and women get between them and their wits. As the Sent of God—the peace of Allah be upon him, and rest!—truly said, 'He that soweth evil shall reap repentance. Do evil and obtain good? Ah, that would be to gather grapes off thorns.'"

"Well, well, but I hope it will all come right yet," said Eversley, doubtfully. "You may depend upon my leaving no stone unturned to get at the truth. And then—then I will do justice."

"I know you will, Sahib," said the Subadar, with a

sigh, "and I will do my duty. I never scrupled to risk my own life when the Government required it, and I shall not spare my son. As I swore, so shall I place Afzul in your hands, dead or alive."

The Subadar soon after took his leave, respectfully declining all the magistrate's invitations to stay all night and to take food; and Eversley would have courteously assisted the old man to mount had Shamsuddeen permitted him. The poor old father rode slowly home, his head hanging down on his breast, and his eyes so full of moisture that he hardly saw the way before him. Agha, seeing him so depressed, thought that perchance he might venture to lead him into conversation and worm out of him the cause of their night-ride. With this object in view, he pricked up his horse and feigned that he could not keep in the animal until he was well abreast of the Subadar; but a stern "Fall back, fellow!" made him speedily pull up and retire to the rear. It was long after midnight when they reached Dhupnagar, and the bazaar was deserted by aught save a few snuffing dogs and prowling jackals that were snouting about for a scanty meal.

"Is my son within, Jeswunt?" demanded the Subadar of his head Hindoo domestic, as he dismounted and endeavoured to straighten his numbed and tottering legs after the long ride.

"Nay, my lord," replied Jeswunt; "he went out about two hours ago, and has not yet returned."

"Agha," said Shamsuddeen, turning round and pointing with his sabre to the trooper, "stand forward."

"Yes, Subadar Sahib," responded the Khyberee, coming briskly forward with a military salute.

"'Tenshun!" The trooper instantly drew himself stiffly up in the required attitude. "You will arrest my son immediately he returns; put him in irons, confine him in the old *zenana*, and mount guard upon the door with loaded carbine, until you are relieved."

"Yes, Subadar Sahib," replied the Khyberee, saluting.

"And hold no communication of any sort with the prisoner, remember."

"No, Subadar Sahib;" and Agha saluted again.

Shamsuddeen went slowly away to his own apartment, supporting his feeble steps upon his sword, and when there he got out an old Koran from a battered haversack that had served him when a private trooper, and sat down by the dim night-lamp to compose his thoughts by devotion. But the tears ran thick and fast down his furrowed cheek, and bedewed his long white beard, so that his eyes could not distinguish the sacred letters. There was no bed for Shamsuddeen that night.

The Khyberee calmly went to the stables and got out a pair of handcuffs, loaded his carbine, and returned to take up his post at the gate. A vague sense of some heavy calamity for which he himself was in a great measure to blame, had fallen upon the trooper's mind, and rendered him incapable of any thought,

save that the Subadar's bidding must be done. The night was bitter cold, and Agha shivered while he kept his sorrowful watch; but it was not the cold that made the hardy Khyberee quail. His trembling hands would hardly light his hookha, and he had scarcely taken the first whiff when he dashed the bowl from his lips with a muttered oath. "O Allah!" he cried, looking up towards the sky, "it is long since I asked aught of Thee for myself, and I may never trouble you more—but spare, oh spare the Child!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN HONEST IAGO.

Mr R. C. Roy still lingered about Dhupnagar, and was still a guest of the reputable Rutton Pal, the spirit-seller. It must not, however, be imagined that Mr Roy took advantage of the *abandon* of Rutton's establishment, for, beyond a modest glass of *arrack* (rum) and water at each meal, the barrister was strictly abstemious, and he steadily ignored the presence of all fellow-lodgers, no matter what attractions their society might hold out. If Mr Roy had been asked what detained him in Dhupnagar, it would have puzzled him to give a sufficient answer. To himself he had renounced all hopes of reclaiming Krishna from the errors of Hindooism; but he was anxious to see the play played out. "In brief," wrote Mr Roy to the head of the Theistic Society, "I have thrown up my brief—pray excuse the pun, for the *paronomasia* is one of my besetting weaknesses; but I think I may just as well stay here until I see the *finale*. Some-

thing *may* perchance"—(on second thoughts Mr Roy erased "perchance" and substituted "through the goodness of Providence")—"through the goodness of Providence occur to give me a chance of extricating our brother from the hands of these heathens. When an immortal soul is at stake, we should not lay aside our efforts for its salvation so long as the faintest spark of hope shines upon our labours." In other words, Mr Roy meant that he would tarry in Dhupnagar until the funds with which the Society had supplied him should have been legitimately disbursed, so that he might have no disagreeable task of making refunds on his return to Calcutta. "Besides," said Mr Roy to himself, "as I have failed this time, they will never employ me in a similar case, and so I had better make the most of it."

To while away his time the barrister had set himself to study the society of Dhupnagar, and with Gangooly's ready assistance he had made himself master of all the private gossip relating to the inner life of the villagers. He had also made the acquaintance of Prosunno, the pleader, in hopes that the village lawyer might perhaps be able to send an appeal or two in his direction. Mr Roy was not long before he knew more of the villagers than they themselves did. He knew the exact position in which the priest's son was placed, and the respective motives which had led Ramanath and Kristo Baboo to arrange the marriage. He saw, too, that love was the cord which bound

Krishna to Hindooism, and his next step was to search for some means of snapping the ligature. With Afzul Khan's character he was soon made familiar; and the notorious gallantries of the Subadar's son, coupled with the famed beauty of Kristo's daughter, soon suggested suspicions in the lawyer's mind, which he was determined to set at rest. It was with the view of satisfying himself upon this point that Mr Roy now began to choose the village green and the environs of Kristo's mansion for his evening promenade.

There was another subject in which Mr Roy had begun to take a keen professional interest. He had gleaned from Gangooly and Prosunno all that they could tell him of the robberies, and he had come to form an opinion of his own upon the matter. Something which he had overheard at Rutton Pal's might perchance have given the barrister an inkling of the mystery; but at all events he ridiculed their suspicions and pooh-poohed the notion that Afzul Khan was the depredator. But when the headman and the pleader sought to share his confidence, Mr Roy knowingly placed his thumb against the tip of his nose, and extended his fingers towards them after the playful manner of the English aristocracy, among whom he had acquired the habit, telling them at the same time that any such confidence upon his part would be premature until he saw which side he was to be retained upon.

Mr Roy was sitting smoking a strong Trichinopoly cheroot on Rutton Pal's low verandah as the Subadar

and Agha rode past him on their mournful errand to the magistrate. There was daylight enough left for him to distinguish the striking figure of the old officer, and to identify Agha as one of Rutton Pal's steadiest customers. "Right, by the Horse Guards' clock!" said Mr Roy. "Prepare to receive cavalry! A fine-looking old gentleman, and sits that vicious black brute as steadily as if he had been brought up in the Blues. His servant is the thirsty Afghan trooper who appreciates my friend Rutton's tap so well. I wonder if anything will come of that scandal about his scampish son? If the case does come to court, they will do well to make me his counsel, for without me all the pleaders in the valley will not bring him off. I suppose I should on moral grounds volunteer my evidence, but my exertions would be all the more hearty that they were paid for. It is getting rapidly dark, and I may as well take a stroll. It is just possible that one may see some nocturnal phenomena of interest about the other end of the village."

Shouting to Rutton to have a mutton-chop ready against his return a couple of hours hence, Mr Roy lighted a fresh cigar and sallied forth. Rutton had come to feel not a little proud of his eccentric visitor, and he did all that he could in his quiet way to make the lawyer comfortable, ordering the more dissolute frequenters of his shop to refrain from annoying the "Baboo Sahib" under the penalty of perpetual exclusion, and taking care that no unseemly scenes

should be enacted within the scope of the stranger's eyesight. Rutton had dealt with ruffians and blackguards all his life long, and he felt it an agreeable change to have a respectable man, even although he was not in caste, under his roof-tree for once in a way.

Mr Roy strolled through the bazaar, looking curiously into the shops, and now and then pausing to return the greeting of some villager whom respect or curiosity induced to salute him. The village elders in general were religiously shy of the renegade's acquaintance; but the younger and wilder spirits were moved by an impious inquisitiveness as to the uncouth habits of the godless nations among whom their travelled countryman had sojourned—to hear of their unclean banqueting upon the flesh of kine and broth of abominable things—and about their women, who danced and walked about with mankind regardless of either decency or decorum. Mr Roy had no objection to magnify himself in the eyes of the Dhupnagar youth by vaunting of the great folks he had met and the great things he had seen; but no sooner had a group of lads gathered about him with open mouths and prickt-up ears, than Dwarkanath the schoolmaster, or some other of the village ancients, would swoop down upon the assembly, carrying off their own sons and nephews from the contamination of the heretic, and scaring away the rest by their scowls of pious horror. But Mr Roy only laughed his usual laugh of conceited good-humour,

and went on his way contented with himself and with all the rest of his species.

As he sauntered along he met Three Shells turning into the lane where his dwelling was, his misshapen clerk Gopee following him with a comfortable-looking cash-box. Three Shells salaamed nearly to the ground as Mr Roy came up, and the lawyer returned the courtesy by a careless wave of the hand which carried his cigar. Three Shells had frequent occasion for legal advice, and he liked to keep good friends with the profession.

"Confounded old fence!" commented Mr Roy as he passed along—"as big a blackguard as a Whitechapel broker. I shouldn't wonder if I have to expose him before I leave Dhupnagar; and yet I won't either, unless I get a brief to do it. As the adage goes, *Ne in consilium accesseris ante quam vocatus;* which means, Don't canvass for business, but take what the attorney sends you. I wonder if there was anything against Mr Three Shells before he came here? I strongly suspect so; *nemo nepente fuit*—people don't grow scoundrels all at once. It won't be very handy for him if ever he falls into my hands—that is another pun, by the way; the ninth—no, the tenth—besides three or four in Bengalee that don't count."

As Mr Roy came out upon the village green, Krishna was just issuing from the temple compound. At the sight of the lawyer, the priest's son paused and hesitated as if he felt half inclined to turn back. He had

a nervous dread of another interview with Mr Roy, and had done all in his power to avoid a collision with him; but he felt ashamed to exhibit his weakness, and after a minute's reflection, he resumed his walk with a rapid pace, intending to pass the lawyer without parley. But Mr Roy was not so thin-skinned as to be shaken off in this fashion; he planted himself right in Krishna's path and held out his hand with a great show of cordiality. "How are you, my dear Gossain? What an age it is since I had the pleasure of seeing you last! You shut yourself up like a recluse over there. I wonder that you are not dead of *ennui* already!"

"I am very fond of solitude," said Krishna, stiffly, and taking no notice of the lawyer's outstretched hand; "my books and my own thoughts are sufficient company, and I feel no want of other society."

As he said this with a significant look which would, he thought, rid him of his companion, Krishna stepped past him and resumed his walk; but the irrepressible Mr Roy at once wheeled about and fell into step with him.

"Quite right, my dear fellow; one's own company is both amusing and instructive compared with the society of these Goths and Vandals about us," returned Mr Roy. "You can't think what a wearisome time I've had of it here without a rational soul to say a word to. I am beginning to feel myself growing as much of an animal as any of them."

Krishna had not imbibed that contempt which his English-speaking countrymen generally feel for the uneducated natives, and he was at that moment disposed to be both national and conservative in his sentiments; but waiving the question, he halted and looked the barrister sternly in the face as he said—

"I hope, Mr Roy, that your protracted stay in Dhupnagar has no relation to my affairs. I have already told you distinctly that all interference on your own part, or on that of the Society which you claim to represent, is useless to you, and disagreeable to me. I should have thought, sir, that one telling would have sufficed you."

"Keep your temper, my dear Gossain—keep your temper," calmly responded Mr Roy. "I have not the slightest wish to meddle with you if you don't want me. I offer you my hearty congratulations on your coming marriage, and hope it may tend to your life-long happiness."

"Thanks," said Krishna, coldly; "I know it will. Of course, I cannot expect the Theistic Society to approve of the match, for it will unhappily clash with their prejudices; but for all that, I wish the Theists well. I am far from thinking that the time has come for throwing off the national faith, or that sufficient knowledge has been vouchsafed us for establishing a new religion; but I can respect and sympathise with those who grope for light amid thick darkness. I was young and rash, and knew not my own mind, when I

contemptuously threw aside a creed that has satisfied the spiritual necessities of millions of my countrymen for a score of centuries; and I am not ashamed to frankly own my error."

"Ah, yes, that was just the way the 'Bengalee Baboo' put it for you in his leader upon your relapse," replied Mr Roy; "it was a capitally written article, and defended you much better than you could have done yourself."

"What! have these cursed Calcutta papers been meddling with my name?" cried Krishna, his face flushing up to the eyes. "Is the sanctity of private life to be thus invaded by wretched, servile scribblers? I see no reason why such liberties should be thus taken with me."

"Why, you see," returned the other, "when you joined the Theists, your friends put an article in the 'Cossitollah Reflector,' lauding the high principle and self-sacrifice and what-not that had led you to break with caste and superstition, and you do not seem to have objected to it. Now, when a man allows himself to be put forward by one party as a paragon, you can't blame the opposition for smashing him when it gets an opportunity."

Krishna groaned. "And what said the 'Reflector' about me?" he asked. "Did it re-echo the abuse of the 'Bengalee Baboo?'"

"No, it did not abuse you; the 'Reflector' never descends to personal contumely," said the barrister,

who was himself connected with that journal. "Of course it could not but lament that one so full of promise should have gone over to the enemy before a blow was struck. But I'll send you the 'Reflector,' and let you see for yourself what it says."

"I care not," said Krishna, "for the sneers of the press. My conscience has fully commended my conduct, and I seek no other encomium. I choose to live and die in the faith of my forefathers; and I would wish every other man to enjoy the same religious freedom as I claim for myself, undisturbed by the solicitations of officious creed-mongers."

"Quite so, quite so," rejoined Mr Roy; "but I say, what a clever girl that *fiancée* of yours must be, to have got the better of an educated and intellectual man like you! What is more, she had nearly effected the conversion of her Muhammadan lover also."

"Muhammadan lover! what do you mean, sir?" cried Krishna, turning fiercely round upon him. "Explain yourself instantly."

"Umph! *Lupus in fabula.* Speak of the devil, you know," replied Mr Roy, calmly, as they turned the corner at Walesbyganj, and discovered Afzul Khan and Sukheena standing by the roadside in deep consultation. The waiting-woman started, and muffling her face in her robe, hurried rapidly homewards; while Afzul, after bestowing a contemptuous frown upon the two Hindoos, walked angrily into the courtyard, clanking his spurs upon the gravel as he strode along. Krish-

na and Mr Roy walked on in silence, until they were clear of the Subadar's house, when the priest's son stood up, and, taking hold of the barrister by the breast of the coat, said, in a low voice that was shaken by passion—

"What did you mean by, a minute ago, allowing your foul tongue to traduce my beloved? What has she to do with Muhammadans, or other unclean barbarians? Speak, sir! Confess that you were lying —meanly and maliciously lying—through spite that you have failed to wile me back to the ways of your fellow-self-seekers. Quick, sir! own your baseness before I strike you to the ground; for, by God, I shall vindicate Radha's fair fame from the falsehoods of such paid mischief-makers as you are!"

"Now, my dear Gossain, do keep your temper," said Mr Roy, blandly, holding up his cigar in gentle deprecation of Krishna's menaces. "I have not the slightest doubt of your muscular prowess, or that you could smash my knowledge-box, and put me in chancery—as my young friend, Viscount Wiseacre, Lord Gotham's eldest son, would say; but what good would that do you? Just take away your hand, and let us talk coolly over the matter."

Krishna released his hold, but stood with clenched fists and flashing eyes waiting to hear what the barrister had to say.

"You saw that woman standing there with the Subadar's son," said Mr Roy, lazily puffing out mouth-

fuls of smoke. "Ah, well—Miss Lahory's waiting-maid, was she not?—well!"

"Well, and what has Miss Lahory, as you call her, to do with the intrigues of her domestics? How can such matters reflect upon her when she probably knows nothing of them?"

"Ah, yes; but then if I were in your place I would make certain that it was her own affairs that the girl was chattering about just now. We all know that your waiting-maid is ever ready to play the part of a go-between."

"Fool!" said Krishna, turning scornfully upon his heel—"narrow-minded and ungenerous fool, to judge the dispositions of others by your own petty and insidious heart. I tell you, man, that if you only knew how good, how pure, how generous, and how angelic is she whom you are slandering, you would go down on your knees, and pray Heaven to forgive you for the sacrilege of slighting one of its fairest works—that is, supposing that you have the spirit of a man and not of a monkey in your bosom."

"My poor Gossain, I can forgive your words," returned the other, "for I know that you are speaking from the generosity of your own heart. But really, I can assure you, that there is more between Afzul Khan and your intended than there ought to be, considering her engagement to you. It is all for your own good and happiness that I am telling you. So far as I am personally concerned, it is nothing though the

young lady had half the males in the district at her feet."

"You are speaking of a matter you know nothing about," said Krishna, scornfully. "If I thought you worthy of such a confidence I might tell you how her own lips have assured me of her love; how I have sat with her side by side, my cheek to her cheek, our hearts responding to each other by mutual throbs of affection: but what would it avail to one so full of base suspicions as yourself?"

"That may be all very well, my dear Gossain, and I have not the slightest doubts of your sincerity and honour; neither would I dispute Miss Lahory's had I not had the evidence of my own eyesight. I have seen her myself lavish all these tokens of affection, and more, upon young Afzul Khan."

"Seen her! Afzul Khan! liar!" cried Krishna, aiming a violent blow at the barrister, who, stepping back to avoid it, missed his footing, and fell into the ditch that flanked the road, and served as a sewer to the village of Dhupnagar. Krishna turned away, and was going to leave him to his fate, when a generous impulse smote him, and he said—

"Mr Roy, I beg your pardon for my violence, although what you have said might well warrant it. I am sorry for your accident, and hope that you are not hurt. And now you will please to consider me a stranger to you henceforth."

"All right, my dear Gossain, I accept your apology,"

said Mr Roy, struggling to extricate himself; "and if you doubt anything that I have said, just judge for yourself. Take a walk now and then about the Lahory compound after bedtime, and you may adopt another view of the matter."

"Never!" cried Krishna, over his shoulder, as he strode rapidly homeward. "My love must be dead before I play the spy."

Mr Roy sat in the ditch, looking curiously after him, until the young man had vanished in the darkness. "No, no, my young friend, you don't impose on me in that fashion. All the poppy and mandragora in the Calcutta chemists' shops won't make you sleep until you have seen the worst for yourself. Ugh! what a cursed smell there is here!"

Scrambling to his feet, Mr Roy regained the road, and proceeded to investigate the damages which he had sustained in the fall. "What an infernal mess!" he said, ruefully; "but it was better to tumble over than be knocked down by Gossain's mace of an arm, and that is a melancholy enough pun. However, I'm sorry for the poor fellow, and shall help him all I can, for he will want my help badly yet before all is over. Alas! there is a breach in my breeches which no skill of mine can repair; and as for my coat, it may undergo a common recovery, but there is the tail cut off sure enough. Ha! ha! that might surely do with Mr Justice Tremor."

Mr Roy soon recovered his spirits, and picking up

the insulated extremity of his upper garment, wended his way homeward towards Dhupnagar. As he passed the house of Lahory he slackened his pace, and looked eagerly about; but seeing nothing to excite his interest, he returned to Rutton's and made himself happy with his mutton-chop and glass of spirits.

"I wish I hadn't told the Society that I had failed to convince Gossain," soliloquised he; "for I'll bet a gold *muhr* that I bring him straight back to Theism within a couple of weeks. And there are a few other little matters that I shall put right before I leave Dhupnagar. By Jove! the fellows about the Bar library will stare when they hear of the business that I've been doing. But what is there that a man may not effect if he only keeps his eyes and his ears open?"

And in his supreme self-satisfaction Mr Roy summoned Rutton, and ordered another allowance of rum to drink to the speedy arrival of his good fortune.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FOLLY OF WISDOM.

If I were actuated by a due regard for dramatic unity, a consideration which gives me but little trouble, I would keep Krishna upon the rack of torturing suspense and uncertainty for at least the next six chapters. When Iago pours the poison into Othello's ear, the Moor does not go hot-foot to Desdemona, and, shaking the lady by the shoulders, demand an instant explanation of her conduct with Cassius. Had he done so, the plot of the story would have been turned into a very different channel: Iago had been kicked out of Cyprus to the tune of the "Rogue's March," honest Michael had been reinstated in his command, with a kindly caution to take care of his cups, and the curtain would have fallen to a merry flourish of trumpets, instead of a roll of muffled drums. If Posthumus had but put a frank letter in the post at Rome, telling Imogene how that villian Iachimo had traduced her, and imploring her to set the mind of her distracted

husband at rest by an explicit denial of the slander, and an assurance of her unalterable affection, per the first mail, how little trouble there would have been compared with all the hurly-burly and racket that fill up three acts of "Cymbeline"! But, in the same way, had Krishna walked straight up the road to Kristo's door, and told the Baboo of the aspersions that were being cast upon his daughter's character, there is no doubt that the young man would have been comforted by an indignant disavowal, by impassioned professions of constancy and of undying love, and by a kiss or two from the pouting lips of his betrothed—that he would have gone home more in love with her than ever—and that the marriage would in due course have been solemnised with all formality. But it is not thus that my story shall end. When Krishna rushed away from Mr Roy, he was bursting with rage at the barrister's calumnies. He scouted the idea that Radha, whom *he* had chosen from among all the maidens of the valley as the one worthy of *his* love—she so chastely cold, so reserved and modest—should be carrying on a clandestine intrigue with a vulgar roisterer like Afzul Khan,—a man of no soul, no sensibilities, and hardly higher in Krishna's eyes than the horse he rode upon. He had in his own mind deified Radha, and there was sacrilege in the supposition that she should be subject to the frailties of her sex. Poor Krishna! how many of us fall into the same error! Is there not something in our love that hallows for the time the object of our

adoration? We worship with veiled faces; we jealously exclude the vulgar from the shrine; we install ourselves as high priests to serve the idol on bended knees,—until some fine morning we wake up to find that it is all delusion, and that we have been prostrating ourselves before mere humanity. The goddess has smiled upon another. How could we ever have thought that porcelain and stucco contained a spark of divinity? Faugh! put the broken toys away in the old cobwebbed cupboard with the headless mandarins, armless shepherdesses, and other ruined gimcracks. We can easily get something prettier to put upon the mantelpiece.

It was all a mean subterfuge of that sneaking puppy Romesh Chunder Roy, to bring him back to the Theistic Society. A pretty Society that sought to found religion by fraud and deceit, and by breaking of the dearest ties that bind mankind together! How thankful Krishna was that he had broken off his connection with men of so little principle! But then it occurred to him that he had on more than one occasion encountered Afzul Khan after dusk in the vicinity of Kristo's premises. And what of that? Radha was not the only woman in the house of Lahory, and nothing more likely than that some of the female domestics encouraged the visits of the young Muhammadan. He had surprised Afzul that very night in company with Sukheena; and did not every one admit that "widow" was the same as "wanton"? But why

should he torment himself with reasoning upon such a subject? Was he not insulting Radha in his own heart, and debasing their holy love, by discussing her honour even with himself? He would as soon doubt his own existence as her innocence; and he would dismiss his doubts, if doubts they could be called, along with the recollection of him that had suggested them.

Triumphing in this generous resolution, Krishna went home and sat down to his books. But although his eyes mechanically followed the printed lines, his mind was still engrossed with the suspicions thrown out by Mr Roy. The more he reflected, the more hold distrust took upon him. Afzul Khan was after all a handsome youth. Krishna thought himself well-favoured as he looked across at the mirror on the opposite wall: his features were regular, his brow lofty, and his figure compact and well made, though perhaps rather stout to be considered graceful; but he could hardly flatter himself that his person would compare with the dashing bearing of the young Muhammadan. Then might not the young profligate have involved the guileless maiden in an intrigue unwittingly of her? She could know nothing of his bad reputation, and might be beguiled by his fair words and pleasant exterior into an intimacy innocent enough on her part. In that case, it might not yet be too late to save her, and he would instantly set about the case. But why had she dissembled with him?—why had she not frankly owned the entanglement? It could not pos-

sibly be that she—and a great lump, almost like to choke him, rose up in Krishna's throat at the thought that Radha might have been playing with his love, while her heart was given to another. But then the love-tapers? Well, did not the omen apply as well to Afzul the Mussulman as to Krishna the Hindoo? And the garland she had thrown to him? But, as Krishna remembered, it would have been a difficult task to distinguish between the two beneath the dark shade of the acacias at midnight.

A few hours' reflection in this strain wrought Krishna up to almost a pitch of madness, and he found himself utterly unable to compose his mind without further action. When the priest's household had retired to rest, the young man wrapped himself in a thick, black cloak, which concealed his face and disguised his figure, and let himself softly down from the balustrade of the verandah. The night was dark as blindness, so that he had to grope his way across the temple compound, stumbling at every other step over stones and roots of trees. The gate was shut, but the young man preferred climbing the walls to exciting the curiosity of Modhoo the porter as to the cause of his young master's nocturnal wanderings.

A faint light was twinkling in Radha's window, and the venetian shutters stood ajar, but there was nothing else to indicate that the maiden was still astir. It was not, however, so much for his betrothed as for his rival that Krishna was now looking. But though

Krishna searched the whole of the shrubbery before the windows of Kristo Baboo's *zenana*, and peered into all the dark nooks of the compound, he saw no traces of Afzul, and the weight of anxiety began to rise off his mind. "I knew it was all an artifice of that *kishkasaghatak* (destroying-confidence, treacherous) renegade," cried Krishna, exultingly; "but he has lost his labour. O Radha! wretch that I was ever to suspect your faith! I could do penance on my hands and knees from here to the Gungaputra, for my vileness in harbouring such a thought! Why did I not beat the scoundrel that dared to sully her name, until he had eaten his own lies? but who would defile himself by beating a pariah dog? O Radha! look out for an instant and turn all this darkness into light by your beautous face, before which even the moon is dim! One glimpse of you would more than repay all the care that has come over me on your account."

But Radha appeared not, and Krishna was left to nurse his passion alone, now loading himself with self-reproaches for having ever admitted a doubt of his betrothed's fidelity, now praying that his mind might be set at rest by an avowal from Radha's own lips. "Though a messenger were to come down from heaven and tell me that she was false," he mentally ejaculated, "I should hold him for a liar until my own eyes made good his charges. I thank God that has given me this confidence in her honour, for life would be insupportable to me without her love. But

I wish I could see her; it is due to herself that I should give her an opportunity of refuting these wicked slanders."

As Krishna stood under the shade of a heavy almond-tree, leaning against the ruined wall of the compound, his ear caught the low murmuring of voices coming from the end of Kristo Baboo's garden. His frequent love-watches had made him more familiar with Kristo's premises in darkness than by daylight, and he had little difficulty in conjecturing whence the sound came. There was an old arbour at the bottom of the garden formed of bamboos and creepers intertwined, and supported by the compound wall for a back. This, as Krishna knew, was the favourite retreat of Radha and her attendant; and he had often stolen hither after their departure in the hope of finding a flower or some other token that had been hallowed by the hand of his mistress. A chilling fear took hold of him as he strained his ear in a vain effort to identify the speakers; and he stepped noiselessly in the direction of the sound. There was only one way by which he could approach sufficiently near to overhear them. It was more than probable that if the arbour was the scene of an illicit assignation, it would be guarded in front by some attendant, who would give the alarm of an intruder; but by crawling noiselessly along the top of the garden-wall, he might ensconce himself behind the bower, and overhear even their faintest whispers. With stealthy and cat-like speed he crept

along the top, pausing every second to hearken whether he was overheard, until he reached the bower and stretched himself out at full length upon the wall, peering intently downwards through the interstices of the bamboo screen, and listening to catch the lowest sound that might be uttered below.

It was well for Krishna that he had the wall to support him, else the first words that fell upon his ears would assuredly have made him stagger. It needed not the glitter of jewels nor the odour of sandal-wood and rose-water to satisfy his heart that his worst anticipations were well founded. Dark as was the night, his jealous eye could see too clearly the lithe figure of his betrothed reclining in the arms of Afzul Khan.

"It is too cruel of you to doubt my love," pleaded a low, silvery voice, every accent of which sent a spasm through the heart of the listener; "have I not done enough to prove it—more than enough for my own good name—more than enough for the honour of my future husband?"

"And yet you are going to marry another!" was retorted in deep, masculine, but not unmusical tones; "does that look much like love? You have wiled me to your feet, you have drawn forth a declaration of my passion, and now you give me the 'begone!' By the ninety-nine names of Allah, girl, you shall not trifle with me thus!"

"Nay, but do not be angry with me, nor grip me thus rudely," whimpered the female voice; "we have

each our fate; can I change mine? It is my lot to be a Hindoo and to wed a Hindoo husband. Had the gods meant me to mate with you, they would have made me of your faith."

"Faith! May Allah exterminate your faith! For what use is your religion except to people hell? Become my wife, and I shall teach you the faith of the Prophet. Lying by my side upon the couches of heaven, you shall behold your heathen lover and kinsfolk writhing amid the tortures of flaming fire."

"But they are my people," replied Radha, with something of her own queenly pride; "and whither they are, I will go too."

"Ay, go to them with all my heart, and take your full measure of their recompense. I might have been wiser than to lay my love upon one of your cold-hearted race. I wanted not rich and beautiful maidens of my own nation, who would gladly have been wives to the son of Shamsuddeen Khan."

"And yet you deigned to cast your eyes upon Hindoo damsels; what an honour for me! and for Bel-puttee, the Ryot of Milkiganj's daughter:" uttered in bitter, taunting tones.

"Honour enough!" retorted Afzul, haughtily; "handsomer maidens than either of you have been carried off at a Mussulman's crupper before this time, and will be so again, please Allah! But I loved you, Radha, as I never have loved other woman. The first time that my eyes lighted upon you, I was slain without a

wound, and my heart has ever since been as an open ulcer, inflamed by the recollection of your charms. Why, oh why, did you lure me to love you, and are now going to cast me from you like an old slipper?"

"And am I not to be sufficiently punished for my folly?" asked Radha, sadly. "Is it a pleasure to me to call one lord whom I loathe; to receive his distasteful embraces as if they were *amrit* (ambrosia) to my heart; to listen to his babbling as if they were the words of a god, and to hide a bruised and bleeding spirit under a smiling face and kissing lips? Call you that no punishment?"

Yet deeper into your soul, Krishna. Are you dreaming, or have your senses forsaken you? Such words could never surely come from the little mouth that you so lately kissed—such sentiments spring from the heart that you so little time ago pressed to your own? And can she, the beautiful glistening serpent there, thus defy truth and honour, and no judgment overtake her? O Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, and the other two millions odd of you, have ye eyes to see and ears to hear, and yet are not shaken with ague or stricken with palsy while such perjury is being perpetrated before you? But the thunders were silent and the lightnings slept, and only a single star came out above Panch Pahar, and winked knowingly upon the group in the arbour. Kristo Baboo's garden wall gave more support to Krishna upon this trying occasion than all the deities in the Hindoo calendar.

"Why then throw yourself away upon that snivelling man of the pen?" demanded Afzul, scornfully—"a fellow that knows as little of the points of a woman as he does those of a horse. Suppose when he marries you he takes some such sort of antipathy to you as he feels for his other wife? Let him go hang himself, and come home with me to Walesbyganj. Once there, and there is not a man in Dhupnagar that will dare to stir a foot to take you back."

"And make my father's name a reproach to all his caste-fellows, bring his grey hairs to a childless and dishonoured bier, and send him to tell the spirits of twenty generations of unstained Lahories that their line has been withered by a woman's disgrace? Not while a leap from Kali Point can end my woes and my life together."

"Bah! you provoke me by your nonsense!" cried Afzul, impatiently. "You know not the man with whom you are trifling. I could carry you off in my arms, with a hand on your mouth, this very minute, as easily as I pluck off this tendril."

"But my honour is in my own power," said Radha, as she withdrew herself from his embrace and held up a small glittering knife between her and the sky. "I should plunge this into my bosom if you dared to lay a rough hand upon me."

"Nonsense, Radha; I was only joking. Give me that knife in case of accidents. I am none of your blustering lovers that keep maidens in terror. Those

whose favours cannot be won for asking may even keep them for me. Marry the man, in God's name! and may Eblis bless him with a faithless wife and a fruitful progeny! Peace be with you, my mistress, and a blithesome bridal!" and rising to his feet, Afzul made a pretence of swaggering out of the arbour.

Let him go his ways with a witness. Be firm, Radha, and call to your aid all the pride of your House! Summon Sukheena, and return to your own chamber. You have erred, but all may yet be well. Your tears and charms will overcome even a harder heart than Krishna's, justly incensed though he be. Verily the gods have blessed you with an opportunity of escape. But, alas for woman's frailness!

"But stay!" cried Radha, eagerly, as she held out her hand to arrest him; "let us not part in anger, since we shall never meet again. It should rather be with love in our hearts and regrets on our lips that we must sever."

"Radha, you are killing me!" cried Afzul, as he flung himself at her feet and seized her hands. "You cannot bid me love and yet despair. Throw aside your girlish weakness, and let me claim you as my bride in the teeth of all the Brahmins in the valley. Think that you have it in your choice to be either happy or miserable. What is such a trifle as your caste and religion compared with the pleasures that await us in our married life? Say but a single 'Yes,' and I am your bond-slave."

"Alas!" said Radha, with a deep sigh, "our fates are not in our own hands. I shall always love you to the latest day of my life, and my heart will ever bound when your name is mentioned, even though I were in Krishna's arms. No one will ever be to me what you are. But there are gulfs between us that we cannot cross."

"Radha," said Afzul, rising before her and drawing himself up to his full height, "I cannot live without you, and I will not. I swear by the tombs of the blessed at Kerbela. Do not, then, tempt me to desperation."

"Peace!" she said, throwing her arms about his neck. "I will not have you say such things. You shall be brave and wrestle with your love, as I shall with mine. We shall keep our own counsel, but let us each be assured that at heart we are still true to one another. And now you must leave me for ever, love. Take one kiss, and do not stay to witness my weakness."

"Talk not to me of peace!" cried Afzul. "Do you not know me better than to think that I will stand calmly aside and see another brook my rights? Before Krishna, the priest's son, become your husband, he must show himself a better man than Afzul Khan, or be sent to keep company with his infidel ancestors in the hotness of hell before his appointed day."

"No, but you must not," pleaded Radha; "for my sake, you must forbear. Suppose you were to kill

Krishna, then the Magistrate Sahib would hang you as he hanged Tej Pal Singh, the highwayman: and how could I live then? My heart would break if aught evil should befall you. See! I take your misfortunes upon my own head," and Radha passed both her hands slowly over Afzul's head and shoulders in the firm belief that she was drawing away from him to her own person any future evil that the Fates might have in store for her lover.

"But you will meet me again? Do not say that this is the last time," whispered Afzul, as he clasped her in his arms and kissed her fervently. "You cannot be so cruel as to leave me thus. Nay, then, I *will* come again, and you *must* meet me."

"Alas!" said Radha, "you will make my name to go forth as a fixer of assignations; and what would my father say if the word came to his ears? And is there not that moon-calf Krishna always wandering about our compound after dark? Oh, I shudder to think that he might fall in with you!"

"Shudder not for me, Radha," said Afzul, scornfully; "but let the Hindoo take the consequence if ever he places himself in my path. I have not much religious merit laid up in store for the Day of Reckoning; but the slaughter of an infidel would go a good way with me. You will come again, then, love, won't you? I shall let you know—— But, by Allah! there is your maid running towards us. There is danger abroad. Flee, my darling, and the Prophet be your protector!"

Sukheena did indeed come running to apprise her mistress that the porter was coming home from the bazaar, whither he had gone to spend the eight-anna-bit that Sukheena had given him to get him out of the way; and that she must make haste and enter the house before the door was shut. Radha started off like a frightened doe, piloted by the waiting-woman, and was soon lost in the distance; while Afzul Khan, cautiously handling his dagger, stole warily away under the shade of the compound wall.

Silence again set in about the old arbour, the night grew darker and darker, and the star above Panch Pahar ceased to twinkle, and retired to ruminate, doubtless, over the scene to which it had been a witness; but still Krishna never stirred from his lurking-place. The cruel words still rung in his ears, and he saw not one Radha, but fifty, clinging to an equal number of Afzul Khans, and whirling about in a strange devil's dance before his glazed eyes. He felt as if the car of Jugannath, with its cruel wheels, had passed over his body and nailed him to the spot, and there was a huge void inside his breast which made him seem to himself like a man that is being frozen to death. Now and then a convulsive shiver would pass through his frame, accompanied by a hysterical swelling of the throat, and a noise between that of laughter and crying. "I shall always love *you* to the latest day of my life," he kept saying to himself; and he felt as if the words were being burned into his

brain in red-hot letters. "I shall always love you to the latest day of my life," he repeated to himself; and he laughed a low idiotic laugh every time that his tongue came across the phrase.

Had Krishna been an English lover, I would in all probability have had the pleasure of treating my fair readers to a refreshment of blood and murder within the compass of the present chapter. The tamest dung-hill-cock will raise his crest and ruffle his feathers at his rival when Dame Partlet, the hen, is looking on. Hodge squares his fists at Tummas, and cries, "Dang un, let un coom on, then!" while Sukey stands by calmly, munching the fairing provided by the liberality of the said Tummas. And Sir Harry looks pistols and the sands of Calais at the gallant Colonel, under Lady Mary's eyes, as plainly as if he said it in so many words. But not even the presence of beauty and the instincts of jealousy will instil chivalry into the heart of a Bengalee. He is constitutionally a coward, and does not scruple to call himself one. And so you see, mesdames, had I told you that Krishna leaped down into the arbour, and, grappling with Afzul Khan, had wrested the dagger from the hand of the infuriated Muhammadan, hurled him to the earth, and then, with one foot placed upon the breast of his prostrate rival, and, holding gracefully aloft the gleaming steel, had delivered a harangue to Radha upon her perfidy and his own generosity in sparing the life of her lover,—why, I might have made a very dramatic scene of it;

but it would have been utterly unlike to nature and to truth. As for my hero, he is as his countrymen are, and I take no shame for him that he cannot compare with Cæsar, and with cannibals, and Trojan Greeks.

But Krishna could not always lie there. At what hour of the night it was that he arose, I know not; but his frame was shivering with ague, and his teeth were chattering in his head, as, with drooping shoulders and hands rolled up in his *chaddar* after the schoolboy fashion, he sought his home with uncertain and faltering steps. He knocked feebly at the temple-gate until Modhoo, the porter, was aroused. And when the old man, alarmed by his altered appearance, asked what ailed his young master, Krishna replied, with a vacant smile, "I shall always love you to the latest day of my life." The crusty porter bestowed a hearty imprecation upon Calcutta and the dissolute habits which Hindoo youth acquire therein; and, taking Krishna firmly by the arm, guided him across the compound, and pushed him into the door of the priest's dwelling, with the parting query, "Whether his father's son thought no shame in coming home at such an hour and in such a figure?"

As Krishna went through the corridor, he met Chakwi, who hastily rushed past him, and sought refuge in her own room. At another time Krishna's curiosity would have been excited by seeing his wife astir at that time of the night and in a costume that clearly betrayed her having been abroad. But it is doubtful whether Krishna was then at all conscious of

her presence, and he certainly never remembered the instance in after-days.

Once in his own chamber, Krishna threw himself, dressed as he was, upon his bed; but whether he spent the rest of the night asleep or awake, he could not tell. Next morning, old Bechoo, his attendant, was alarmed to find his young master suffering from a severe attack of fever and ague, and protesting in his delirium that he would always love the old man to the latest day of his life.

We must now accompany the successful lover on his homeward journey. Afzul Khan, dagger in hand, made his way with slow and stealthy steps through Kristo's compound, pausing every other minute to look warily about him lest any spies should be on the watch. When he reached the gap in the wall beside the high-way leading from the village to the river, he stood and waited, to see that there were no chance passers-by to observe him leaving Kristo's premises. But all was still, both on the road and in the village above him, and no sound fell upon his ear except the rustle of the chill night-wind among the trees, and the dull murmur of the river in the bottom of the valley.

Once upon the road, Afzul threw away his previous caution, and, returning his dagger to the sheath, and sticking his hands in his girdle, he walked jauntily towards Walesbyganj, whistling a bugle-call, and now and then pausing to indulge in a quiet laugh of triumphant contentment.

"Aha! my little infidel," he said, half aloud, "you played with a tiger-cub when you thought to trifle with Afzul Khan! Those who toy with gunpowder generally scorch their fingers. Another night's persuasion, and I'll give my oath that you are as willing to put your foot in the stirrup as I am to say 'mount.' The darling *huri* of paradise! I never loved woman like her, and never shall love another. Once we are married, I shall settle down for certain. I swear to the Prophet that the dice-box shall never come into my hands again, and that I shall flee from wine as from the fire of hell. I wonder if Radha is gone to bed yet? I really wish her Hindoo lover had been a man with more fight in him, that I might have shown myself worthy of winning her."

As he came down before the gate of Walesbyganj, he noticed that the door was open, and that a light was burning in the passage—a most unusual circumstance at that hour of the night. But Afzul's spirits were too high to anticipate any evil.

"Ah, a light in the doorway! Nothing wrong with the horses, I hope. And, by the tomb of Shah Suffi! there is Agha on sentry with his old regimental carbine on his shoulder. Can the old fellow be drunk? It is some whim of the Subadar's, I'll wager. He'll be going to keep up night guards, and will be making me officer of the rounds next. Well, I shan't give them much molestation. Ho, ho, my friend! what is the word for the night in this impregnable fortress of yours?"

And Afzul walked laughingly up to the door, until he was abreast of the Khyberee, when, to his great amusement, Agha suddenly presented his carbine at the young man's bosom, and called out "Stand!" in a hoarse voice. Afzul laughed outright at what he considered an excellent joke; but in another instant Jeswunt Rao and a couple of grooms rushed from behind and seized his arms, while Agha, laying aside his carbine, instantly thrust a pair of handcuffs on his young master's wrists.

The whole operation was so quickly effected, that Afzul had not time to utter even a word of remonstrance. When he recovered from his surprise, and looked at the troubled faces of his captors, he saw at once that something was wrong, and broke forth into a fury of passion.

"What, in the name of Shaitan, is the meaning of this?" he bawled. Are you mad, or drunk, fellows, to lay hands on me in this fashion? Loose my arms instantly, if every soul of you would not be flogged until your bones are bare. Explain this insolence, rascal," he added, shaking his fettered hands menacingly at Agha.

"No order," grunted the Khyberee, taking up his carbine again; "bring on the prisoner, Jeswunt Rao;" and amid a scuffle of kicking and swearing, the servants forced Afzul up the stair, and into the deserted rooms, which had been set apart for the ladies in the days when the Subadar's wife had been alive. Into

one of these the young man was unceremoniously thrust; his hands were unbound, and the door slammed to after him and locked on the outside; and, shouldering his carbine, Agha began to walk up and down the passage with measured tread. The other servants retired while Afzul was still shouting out oaths and menaces against all who had been concerned in his incarceration. To these succeeded appeals to Agha's affection, and reproaches upon Agha's faithlessness; but all were alike in vain: and wearied at last by his vain exertions, the young man at length desisted, and threw himself upon the floor in a state of sullen dejection. Tears were falling fast from Agha's eyes as he turned a deaf ear to Afzul's entreaties; but he never for a moment forgot the stern orders of the Subadar. He would have essayed a prayer; but beyond the confession of faith, "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is His Prophet," Agha's orisons would go no further. He tried to recall the prayers that his old *moulvie* had taught him when a child, far away among the trans-Indican hills; but Agha had evermore been an apter pupil at feud and foray than at school, and his slender stock of divinity had long since taken leave of him. Wearied at length with walking, he sat down in the embrasure of a window, and leaning his head upon the muzzle of his piece attempted to think out some solution of Afzul's troubles. But unless assisted by his favourite pistol, Agha's ideas refused to arrange themselves; and not even the affectation of polishing

his own wrist would aid his mental faculties. So the old man turned sadly away, to think of his own past life, and of all the violence and wickedness which he had wrought in his day, as well as of the evil example he had set his young master; and great sobs began to shake his rugged bosom. But the Subadar's orders must be obeyed, though Agha should blow out his own brains when they were executed. And thus the watches of this memorable night wore slowly away.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BANKSI LALL'S BOND.

It will not be forgotten that when Kristo Baboo opened his safe with the boasted "Burmah" lock, and found that the money which was to have defrayed the expenses of Radha's bridal had entirely disappeared, he fell back insensible upon the floor. The regimen of Kristo's household was, however, such that the eye of no prying domestic marked his misfortune, for his servants would hardly attend him when summoned, much less were they likely to intrude unbidden into his apartments. But though no kindly hand chafed his limbs, or dashed water in his face, Kristo came round in due time, and sitting up, looked with a blank face upon the empty coffer where his treasure had been deposited.

In that first glance Kristo saw utter ruin to himself and his family. His property was already encumbered to double the amount which it could legitimately bear, and here was the last straw that was to break the

camel's back. Then what was to become of his daughter's marriage? Should he conceal all until the ceremony was perfected, and then trust to the generosity of the Gossains to save him? But what excuse could he then offer to Ramanath, who had been made aware of the negotiation with Three Shells? And besides, the priest would have to advance the bridal expenses, for there was not a tradesman in the Gungaputra district so simply confiding as to do a day's work for Kristo without the assurance of ready-money payment. The more Kristo considered his position, the more desperate it seemed. He would have locked the door and hanged himself, but for the thought of what would befall his daughter if left a penniless and unprotected orphan. He would fain have gone to Ramanath Gossain and unburdened all his troubles without reserve to his old friend; but to do this required a greater amount of moral courage than Kristo was master of. But above all, the thought that pressed most heavily upon him, and which he was most anxious to exclude from his mind, was the probability of a sudden call for the ten thousand rupees coming upon him. In that case, said Kristo to himself, I am indeed ruined beyond remedy.

Upon ordinary occasions, the least trifle of annoyance was sufficient to unhinge Kristo's mental faculties, and to render him utterly incapable of calm reflection. But the magnitude of his present misfortune, and still more the dread of impending consequences, now inspired him

with the coolness of utter despair. Those of us who have seen a shipwreck may have marked the desperate composure with which some poor wretch grasped at life in the face of death, seeming to calculate with the *sang froid* of an experimental philosopher the strength of each separate board, or the force of each successive wave, and to compress the thoughts of hours within the compass of a few seconds. So it was with Kristo. Unless he kept all his faculties upon the alert to catch a chance hen-coop or passing spar, he must soon flounder and sink among the fathomless waters; and so, by a rigid exercise of will, he controlled his feelings, and began to look around him for some way of evading the impending ruin.

In the first place, who was the thief? Kristo felt that the loss of his money might almost be borne if the crime could be brought home to Afzul Khan. But in his own mind Kristo did not suspect the Subadar's son. A terrible apprehension had taken hold of his mind that the usurer had employed some devilish artifice to beguile him. Three Shells did not bear the best of names among the superstitious villagers, who readily ascribed to the practice of sorcery the strange noises, the untimely lights, and the mysterious appearances that were to be seen of nights about the money-lender's dwelling. Kristo remembered well the case of Ram Mohun, the landlord of Usarghar, far up the valley above the town of Bhutpore. Ram Mohun, being at his wits' end for money to meet the collector's demands, had

made a vain pilgrimage to all the mahajans in the valley, and coming home weary and dispirited, had inadvertently sat down to rest on the parapet of the ruined bridge, beside which Tej Pal Singh, the *dakait*, had murdered a high-caste Brahmin of Bhutpore, for which thing's sake a curse had very properly fallen upon the locality. Ram Mohun had not sat long there when he spied a venerable Brahmin coming slowly along the road, for whom, as he seemed breathless and exhausted, the landlord made way, that the old man might sit beside himself, and courteously begged his blessing. They fell into conversation, and somehow or other Ram Mohun took the stranger into his confidence, and told him of the ungrateful conduct of the district usurers, to whom he had all his life been a liberal patron; but what was his astonishment when the old man readily offered to accommodate him with the very sum he required, taking his six months' bill as the sole security for both principal and interest? The money was counted over in good Company's rupees, and the old man went on his way, promising to call for the debt when the bill became due, while Ram Mohun went home so elated, that, as he said himself, he seemed to be treading the clouds beneath his feet the whole way. There was a mighty feast prepared that night at Usarghar, and many blessings invoked by the zemindar upon the head of his unknown benefactor. But what was his dismay next morning, when on opening his bag he found nothing but a heap of

carefully-picked *lichi* stones (*lichi*, a variety of acidulous fruit, in shape something like the plum)? But this was not the worst of it; for just six months from that day, Ram Mohun went amissing, and nothing could be conjectured as to his whereabouts until one morning his corpse, all bloated and bruised, and more than half eaten by the alligators, was cast up by the current hard by the foot of Kali Point. And Kristo was not altogether free from anxiety that some such misfortune might result from his own dealings with Three Shells.

But still he must do something in the matter. He had thought at first of publishing the robbery and examining the servants, but a little reflection convinced him that his most prudent course would be to keep the matter strictly secret. If the news of his loss were to get wind, his creditors would come down in flocks upon him, and in a few weeks he would be turned out of doors. He might, too, just as well send out a crier with a drum to proclaim the theft all over the village, as call Gangooly, the headman, to his assistance. Nor was there any use in soliciting the aid of Preonath Dass, the Dipty, after the scornful manner in which Kristo had dismissed his suit for Radha's hand; for there could be little doubt that Preonath would overlook no opportunity for avenging himself. There only remained, then, the magistrate to whom he could go for redress; and Kristo at last resolved to confide his wrongs to him, although as a turbulent landlord

and constant revenue defaulter, he was well aware that he had little claims upon Mr Eversley's consideration.

So, ordering his palanquin, Kristo made ready for his journey to Bhutpore, and all the way thither his mind was engrossed in the preparation of his case for the magistrate's opinion. It was not without considerable reluctance that Kristo had made up his mind to tell the truth to Mr Eversley. Like too many of his countrymen, he had but a limited belief in the efficacy of truth, and could he have safely done so, he would much rather have based his story upon imagination than upon fact. But Mr Eversley was a confirmed sceptic in Bengalee veracity, and his habit was to assume every statement as a falsehood until it had been corroborated by proof; and the most feasible story that Kristo could concoct might give way upon him if the magistrate were to sift it by a cross-examination. So while Mr Eversley listened with the deepest attention, Kristo unfolded the tale of all his difficulties,—his daughter's coming marriage, his desire to save the reputation of his family by leading the people to believe that the expenses were coming out of his own pocket, his visit to Three Shells and the receipt of the loan, the safe with the "Burmah" lock, and the mysterious disappearance of the money. There were two matters, however, about which the Baboo judged it prudent to keep reticent—the complicity of Afzul Khan, and his suspicion of enchantment; for the

Muhammadans were known to stand high in the magistrate's favour, and the Sahibs all laughed at the mention of magic, as they did at many other things that were matters of religious faith with a Hindoo. So Kristo finished his piteous story by declaring himself a ruined man, and protesting that he had no hope of discovering the depredator save in his lordship's boundless wisdom, which was extolled throughout the seven continents, and of which even the gods themselves might well be jealous.

After a minute's consideration, during which the magistrate was debating with himself whether or not the whole story was a *ruse* to obtain some grace from Government at the approaching revenue term, Mr Eversley said slowly—

"Well, Baboo, as you wish the matter to be kept secret, I don't see very well that I can take any immediate action. But so far as catching the thief is concerned, you may make your mind easy, for I have sworn to have him in Bhutpore jail before the month is out. Of course, the recovery of your money is a different thing, but you may be sure that I'll make the police do their best for you. I think you have done very well to keep your own counsel," added the magistrate, as he bethought himself how Mr Muffington Prig and the 'Peon' would exult to get this fresh excuse for falling foul of his district administration. "And if I can help it, you shan't be any the worse for not making an outcry about your loss. Just keep quiet

and look about you, and if anything suspicious strikes you, let me know of it at once."

Not only did the magistrate not make any allusion to outstanding arrears of revenue as Kristo had dreaded, but he even payed the Baboo the compliment of convoying him to his palanquin,—an honour which raised Kristo's pride above all his misfortunes, for hitherto he had always appeared before Mr Eversley as a delinquent or a defaulter. And when the Baboo had gone on his way to Dhupnagar, the magistrate, after reconsidering the case, despatched an orderly to summon Shamsuddeen Khan. We already know the issue of the old officer's night ride.

The interview with the magistrate had so far raised Kristo's spirits, that he had almost resolved to take Ramanath into his confidence, and to see whether or not he might expect assistance from the Gossains; but he was weary with his journey and wanting both rest and refreshment, and so he ordered his bearers to carry him home, resolving to tackle Ramanath about the hour of evening worship. But a harbinger of evil was waiting for him by his own door. The first object his glance lighted upon as he rolled out of his palanquin, was the figure of Three Shells seated upon a strip of matting under the shade of the archway. The mahajan's little eyes were almost hidden under the expression of intense humility which he had assumed, as he simpered and salaamed a welcome to his client.

"Surely the shadow of a demon has fallen upon

me," groaned poor Kristo, inwardly, as he returned Three Shells' salutation, "for it is not for good that he comes hither."

The Baboo led Three Shells up-stairs and placed him with great show of politeness upon the softest seat in the room, beginning at the same time a long and somewhat incoherent disquisition upon the state of the rice crops, and the calamity that would ensue if the rains were to keep off for another week, which might the gods in their wisdom avert; and as touching the summer sowings, there was no hope that——

"I hear you have been at Bhutpore, Baboo," interrupted the money-lender; "is there any word of the Magistrate Sahib stirring in these robberies yet?"

"Robberies!" stammered Kristo, "why should I know? I was there upon business relating to my daughter's marriage, and saw nothing of the Magistrate Sahib. But why do you ask me of the robberies?" added he, recovering himself so far as to fix a keen look upon the money-lender's countenance. "You surely don't think that I have any concern with them?"

"Ha, ha!" chuckled Three Shells—"what a thing to say! As well might *you* think that *I* am one of the thieves. A laughable jest indeed."

"I am quite exhausted," observed Kristo, languidly, as he endeavoured to lead the conversation away from so delicate a subject, "with making preparations for my daughter's marriage. As the Shastras say, 'There

is an autumn for everything, and let everything be done in its season;' and I shall have a busy time of it until I get the ceremony over."

"May it be perfected in an auspicious moment," said Three Shells, shutting his eyes and folding his hands across his stomach; "but, Baboo, I have come to talk to you on business."

"Business!" re-echoed Kristo, reddening up to his eyebrows, while a cold sweat began to break out over his body—"I'm sick of business. Could you not speak about something else for a change? Well, what is fated is fated; but mind you don't get any money from me just now."

"I don't wan't any money," replied Three Shells, quietly, without opening his eyes; "there are, of course, my two bonds—one overdue nine months and the other five—but there is no hurry about them. You can settle at your own convenience after the marriage."

"Good,' said Kristo, with a sigh of relief. "I shall soon satisfy you, then; and if there is anything else that I can do for you, you have only to say what it is."

"It is not on my account that I have come," returned Three Shells; "but it is because of a letter I have received to-day from my valued correspondent Banksi Lall of Barra Bazaar. He has made an enormous speculation in Company's paper, and wants *his* money immediately. How lucky it is that we have got the information so early, before you can have broken upon the cash!"

"Eh? broken upon the cash?" said Kristo, in a husky whisper, and staring the mahajan stupidly in the face. "Wants his money? But he can't have it, —not an anna—not a pie of it,—by the ever-living Vishnu!"

The mahajan smiled pleasantly. "Ah, you wouldn't say that if you knew Banksi Lall," he said. "He is not a man to say anything that he does not mean. If Banksi says he must have his money, he will have it, although all the lawyers in Calcutta and Dhupnagar were to hold out their hands between him and it. If you'd take a friend's advice, you'll give up the *takkas* (rupees) without raising a tempest about it."

"I have just fifty rupees in my purse, and not another coin between me and beggary. I swear it by the holy Linga of Dhupnagar," answered Kristo, in a voice that was nearly inaudible from emotion.

"Impossible! What! spend ten thousand rupees in four-and-twenty hours?" said Three Shells, with a derisive sneer. "Such things might be done at Delhi, but hardly in a quiet place like Dhupnagar. What has become of the money, Baboo?"

"Ay, what has become of the money?" cried Kristo, furiously. "I ask you that. Where is the money?"

"Eh?" answered Three Shells, with a look of feigned curiosity, not unmingled with concern. "What mean you? But I see that you are jesting with me all this time. I warrant me you have the

silver safe and sound there," added he, pointing to Kristo's redoubted strong-box.

"Yes, you and your unhallowed sorceries know best where the money has gone to," reiterated Kristo. "When I opened my safe this morning, it was as empty as the stomach of a devotee's dog. I wish your ill-omened eyes had been picked out by vultures before they fell upon aught under my roof!"

"Sorceries!" re-echoed Three Shells, with a sigh of relief and a sardonic laugh. "Aha! sorceries! But, my good Baboo, these excuses won't do for my esteemed friend Banksi Lall of Barra Bazaar. How Banksi Lall would laugh to hear you say that Three Shells had charmed away your money! But poor Three Shells is no conjuror. Would that he were! So here is your bond, and please to produce the rupees."

Here Kristo burst forth into a torrent of incoherent abuse of the money-lender and protestations of the sincerity of his statements, appealing to the whole host of gods and demi-gods to witness his veracity, charging Three Shells with having plotted his ruin, and vowing all the vengeance of lawyers and magistrates against the mahajan for his treachery. Three Shells heard him calmly to the close with shut eyes and folded hands, raising now and then a finger in gentle appeal as the Baboo thundered out some more than ordinarily violent invective, or coined some novel variety of foul-mouthed epithet. At last, when

Kristo's breath and his vocabulary were alike exhausted, the mahajan managed to interpose, in quiet, business-like tones—

"The borrower has a bent knee and a sweet mouth; the debtor closes his fist and curses his creditor. But all this will not pay Banksi Lall's bond, and it is my duty to call upon you now to settle at once or stand by the consequences."

"Not an anna, though my house were built of gold and silver! Do your worst, and see what you will gain by it. My bond to your cursed Banksi Lall is but a mote among the mass of my other debts. But the rest of my creditors are men of good caste and consideration, who would scorn to let you push me to extremity. Begone from my house, and bring your bond after the bridal if you would have it discharged. I am even degrading my Brahmin's rank by parleying so long with a vile outcast like yourself."

"I am highly favoured," retorted Three Shells, bending low in a mock salutation. "You are the father and mother of Brahmins, cows, and women. But if your bondsman might speak, he would say that he is your sole and only creditor, having for the last two or three years bought up every bill and bond that he could find with your honour's name upon it; and really the holders were not loath to dispose of them."

And Three Shells took out from his bosom a bundle of papers, and spread them before the Baboo's eyes. There was no need for the money-lender to particularise

them; Kristo well knew the amount of each bond, and long before Three Shells had finished shuffling them, he clearly saw that he was bound hand and foot in the mahajan's power. Three Shells took out a pencil and affected to sum up the amounts, although he could have told to a pie the extent of the Baboo's obligations; but he was anxious to give Kristo time to compose himself, and to make up his own mind as to the course he should follow with the Baboo.

"I find, Baboo," said he at length, "that my honoured correspondent, Banksi Lall of Barra Bazaar in Calcutta, holds in his hands liabilities of yours to the extent of a lakh and a quarter of rupees. I also notice some little mistakes which the Magistrate Sahib may possibly put to rights; such as the hypothecation of the lands of Gaogong and Gharibghar twice over to different individuals."

"But they were hypothecated each time for half the actual value; I will take my oath on Ganges water that they were so," urged Kristo, in a faint tone.

"Perhaps; but Banksi will soon be able to judge for himself," replied Three Shells, coldly; "and now, give me your final answer—are these bonds to be paid, or shall we proceed to put Banksi Lall in possession of his own by the law?"

"Cursed blood-suckers!" roared Kristo; "I wish both you and your Banksi Lall were dead and buried with cow-skins for your winding-sheets. It is all an infamous plot—a conspiracy to possess yourselves of my

ancestral lands, and turn me and my daughter penniless from beneath my father's roofs. Do you think, wretch, that there are no gods to punish such treachery towards a Brahmin? May my curse, and the gods' curse, and the curse of all my holy order——"

"Nay, Kristo Baboo," interrupted Three Shells, somewhat hurriedly, "you should not be so hasty with your maledictions. My client Banksi Lall is not the man to be hard upon a Brahmin of such good caste as you are. I have no doubt that if he were civilly approached he would put you in a way of saving yourself."

Kristo looked doubtfully up. "Where is this Banksi Lall to be found, then?" he asked. "I shall go to Calcutta and wait upon him myself."

"Ah, but you cannot see Banksi Lall," replied the mahajan, once more shutting his eyes; "it is one of Banksi's peculiarities that he will never do business with a client himself. Banksi says he is too soft-hearted, and cannot refuse a borrower even to his own prejudice, and so he is obliged to do all his business by deputy. You might easier gain access to the great Lord Sahib himself at Calcutta, than to the presence of Banksi Lall of Barra Bazaar. But his humble slave, Three Shells, is possessed of Banksi's mind, and will do his best to forward any proposals that you may make for freeing yourself from these encumbrances."

"What can I say?" demanded Kristo, surlily. "Am I not in your hands, and bound to do your bidding? The cat asks not of the mouse what death it would die.

All that a man may do I will do, rather than see strangers sitting in the home of my fathers."

"Hem," responded Three Shells, shutting his eyes still closer, and clasping his hands nervously together, "there are certain conditions by which such a misfortune might be avoided; and if you are prepared to listen to them, as a sensible man should do, you may rely upon my best assistance."

"Say on, then," said Kristo, in desperation; "the butcher needn't make a bow to the lamb."

"Well, then, the first and chief condition which Banksi Lall makes is, that you must renounce this marriage for your daughter with Krishna Chandra Gossain," said Three Shells, in a curt and hurried manner.

Kristo started, and looked the mahajan keenly in the face. "What! and blacken my face before my worthy friends the Gossains? Disgrace myself in the eyes of all the Brahmins in Dhupnagar? What can my daughter's marriage have to do with the matter?"

"But you must not ask me that," replied Three Shells, with a faint smile. "Banksi Lall is not in the way of troubling his agents with explanations of his motives. His yeas and nays are enough for them."

Kristo remained silent, buried in bitter reflection. It would be a most awkward position that in which a rupture with the Gossains would place him, but anything was better than parting with his family property. There was, besides, this recommendation in the pro-

posal, that if the marriage were broken off, he could make out in the meantime without more money until his rents came in, and in time he might find some means of circumventing his persecutors. Surely a clever lawyer like the Dipty could be able to suggest some fatal flaw in their position; and if Krishna were dismissed, Preonath could be again admitted to his friendship, and employed in his service. Time had always been Kristo's guardian angel; and for Time he was now prepared to promise anything that might be asked of him.

"To show you how far I am disposed to befriend you," continued Three Shells, "I should be willing myself to marry your daughter upon the same footing as Krishna would have done, and to guarantee you in your ancestral property during your lifetime. So much, I think, my influence with Banksi Lall will enable me to offer you."

Had Three Shells in the days of Kristo's prosperity ventured to ask the Baboo for a whiff of his hookha, or for a glass of water, or for any other trifling concession of caste equality, he would have raised such a storm about his ears as would have deterred him from ever attempting to take such a liberty in future. But standing upon the brink of ruin, Kristo heard this startling proposal with an unmoved countenance, and perhaps with a certain degree of savage satisfaction. It was one weak point revealed in his opponent's position, and by operating cautiously upon it, he might

keep the enemy in play until some opportunity of escape presented itself. So he suppressed his disgust and answered evasively—

"Marry my daughter! A proper request indeed! I wonder if you left your wits behind you at home! Have the gods by any miracle made you a Brahmin, that you venture to aspire to my daughter's hand?"

"I have made myself better than any Brahmin in the Gungaputra district," retorted Three Shells. "You are not the only high-caste landholder that I could turn out to beg his bread upon the highway. I could make your daughter mistress of the Ghatghar palace to-morrow, if I thought fit, and treat her to such a splendid bridal as many a rajah's daughter might be proud of. Will your caste stand you in as good stead when my honoured client Banksi Lall turns you and your daughter out of this house with just as much clothes upon your persons as decency demands, and no more?"

"You must give me time to think about it," said Kristo. "I can't betroth my daughter as I would sell a basket of mangoes—more especially as she has been already promised; you must give me a few weeks to think it over."

"Well," replied Three Shells, "I would be willing to favour you so far; but you must break off the match with the Gossains instantly; and what is more, you must be careful to keep my name out of the matter; but that you will do, of course, for your own sake."

"I don't see the use of such a hurry," grumbled Kristo; "it is not as if we were running for water to drown out a house on fire. I'll tell them—let me see —yes, I'll tell them the first lucky day after the new moon is full, and that will be sure to bring things to a happy ending."

"Nay, but Banksi Lall is obstinate upon this point," said Three Shells, shaking his head. "The Gossains must be told at once that it cannot be; these were Banksi's very words, and I am bound to see them carried out."

Kristo muttered a fervent prayer that Banksi Lall of Barra Bazaar might hereafter stew among the boiling copper of Kala Sutra for three and a half millions of years, as the gods have wisely ordained for those who despise and harass a twice-born Brahmin; but when Three Shells mentioned the name of Banksi Lall, the Baboo knew that all argument was in vain. Three Shells again recapitulated the various dangers by which Kristo was threatened, and pointed out the terrible vengeance which he and Banksi Lall would wreak upon the Baboo if they found him endeavouring to play them false, or to thwart their designs; and when he thought that Kristo's terrors were sufficiently aroused, the mahajan took his departure, promising to call again next day and talk over the matter. Kristo took leave of his visitor at the house door with a surly salutation, and returned to his own room to smoke the tobacco of bitterness in solitude and despair.

The whole district of the Gungaputra did not contain a happier man than Three Shells, the mahajan, as he came forth from the house of Lahory, and took his road through the bazaar towards his own house. He was astonished at his success. All the difficulties that he had conjured up, all the tactics that he had arranged with so much trouble of mind, all the expedients that he had provided against possible contingencies, had never presented themselves or been required, and his whole course had been plain and easy. Surely Three Shells did not err in imagining that the gods were working with him, and that it was to their favour his good fortune was due. That *lota* which he had gifted to the Linga had more than paid itself; and Three Shells began to calculate whether his interest in the good graces of the gods was yet exhausted, or whether it would still bear the strain of the deeds which remained to be done. On the whole, considering the hazardous nature of his future undertakings, Three Shells thought it might be as well to insure himself against danger by another present to the Linga; but he had fully made up his mind that he would not in the long-run leave the gods his debtors.

So he went homeward highly contented with himself, and with most of his fellow-creatures. He smiled to the tradesmen in the bazaar; he made obeisance to the Brahmins; he stopped and gave an alms to Monnoo, the paralytic cripple who sat by the door of the grain-dealer; and when two little urchins ran

against his legs in their play, he stooped and pulled the little fellows playfully by the hair. What a kind money-lender! what a benevolent person! thought everybody whom he passed; no wonder though he prosper, for it is only his deservance. And had they spoken their thoughts aloud, Three Shells would have heartily acknowledged the truth of the observation. After all, success is your only salve for a sore conscience.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SUBADAR'S SORROW.

The ruddy glare of an Indian morning broke upon Walesbyganj, rousing up the Subadar's domestics to the discharge of their daily duties, and opening the care-closed eyes of the heads of the family. Shamsuddeen raised his head from the table upon which he had wearily rested it, and looked languidly out of the window. He had fallen into a brief and troubled slumber in which his mind had been tormented by ominous visions and forebodings of future evil, and he had wakened to find them realised to their worst extent. It seemed hard that the night should be so short; still harder that the golden hours of morning should bring no relief. Shamsuddeen had been wakened many a morning by the rattle of musketry or the hoarse roar of cannon to the consciousness that his next repose might be in the arms of death; but never had he buckled himself for the battle-field with

half so heavy a heart as he now prepared to seek his son's presence.

But he must first snatch a brief respite from earthly care to peform his morning devotions. Having carefully washed his face and hands, according to the ritual of the Prophet, the Subadar took up his strip of prayer-carpet and went down to his garden. There, upon a little plot of grass, screened off by thick shrubbery from all irreverent eyes, the old man turned his face towards a giant myrobalan tree which stood forth upon the highest ridge of Panch Pahar, like the sentinel of the forest, and behind which the Subadar's spiritual adviser had calculated that the holy city of Mecca lay in a straight line, and slowly prostrated his aged limbs in prayer. Shamsuddeen was always rigid in his observance of the Prophet's ordinances, and now he found them to be the readiest relief from his afflicted thoughts. Whether Hindoo or Muhammadan, Christian or Pagan, we all seek an ear that is not mortal into which to pour our plaints, and crave for a sympathy that is wider and deeper than that of mere humanity. And this is at least a catholic faith.

But the longest prayers must have an "Amen;" and when Shamsuddeen had accoutred himself at all points with his spiritual harness, he was obliged to prepare himself for asserting his authority after the manner of the flesh. He went to his own room, and, calling his bearer to assist him, he dressed himself in his best uniform from turban to spurs, put his order and

medals on his breast, and buckled on his long cavalry sabre with the massive silver hilt that had been presented to him by his native brother-officers of Walesby's Horse, on the occasion of his leaving the regiment. It was not so much to overawe Afzul as to support himself that the Subadar had donned the insignia of command; for he seemed to regain his old manly vigour and courage when he put on his military trappings, and to find himself once more the bold dragoon that had wooed death so often in the ranks of Walesby's, and had ridden back with proud heart and erect head from the bloody flirtation. Yes: the frail old pensioner lay behind there in the heap of loose and padded clothes; and Shamsuddeen Khan, the Subadar, went clanking with firm and steady step towards the door of the old *zenana* where his son was confined.

He found the Khyberee faithful to his trust, and the old trooper drew himself up and presented arms as his master approached. It was hard to say upon which of the two the night's sorrow had set the deepest impress. Agha's face was deadly pale, and his eyes hollow and inflamed, as if with bitter tears; and indeed the trooper had been weeping piteously when no witnesses were by to see him thus unmanned. The sight of Agha's face was a sore trial for the Subadar's sternness, but he mastered himself with an effort and said, "You are relieved now—go;" and as the Khyberee turned an appealing look upon his master's face, the Subadar sharply reiterated his orders, "'Bout

face, march!" and the trooper had no alternative but to make a humble salute, shoulder his carbine, and trudge down-stairs. When the Subadar entered the *zenana*, he found his son stretched upon the floor in a sound sleep. Afzul, however much of a Sybarite he might be when opportunity offered, could always resume his soldier's habits when needful; and he had pillowed his head upon his arm and laid himself down upon the bare boards without any sense of hardship. The angry clouds which had settled on his face had been chased away by bright visions of love and Radha; and as the Subadar stood looking down upon his son's countenance, he saw the young man smile joyfully, and heard him mutter some expression of imaginary endearments. It was no wonder though the father sighed as he looked down upon the sleeping youth. In spite of some ravages that dissipation had prematurely wrought upon his handsome features, Afzul might have served for the model of an Eastern Apollo; his face had all the regularity and none of the cunning that characterises the classic type of Persian beauty, and his body and limbs had the shapely symmetry of the Bengalee, along with the sinewy robustness of the Afghan warrior.

"So comely, so soldier-like, and yet so vile," sighed Shamsuddeen to himself. "O Allah! for which of my many sins am I thus afflicted? But I murmur not, for I know that it is for Thy glory that everything has been ordained. Oh that he had found an

honourable death upon a Booteah's spear in the war-time!"

Afzul stirred and turned himself in his sleep. "Bah! your father?" he murmured. "What matters it what your father says? Once in my arms I dare all the fathers in Bengal to harm a hair of your head."

"Ay," said the Subadar, bitterly, to himself, "he preaches filial disobedience even in his sleep, as he hath ever practised it in his waking hours. Who would be a father in this guilty age? Afzul," he added aloud,—"Afzul, get up!"

The young man dreamily opened his eyes, started as he saw the Subadar standing beside him, and instantly sprang to his feet, making a military salute.

"My father!" he cried, in surprise; "and in uniform thus early." Then, as the recollection of his arrest flashed across his memory, he added as he drew himself haughtily up to his full height, "Now I shall know, perhaps, whether it was by your orders that this indignity has been offered to me, and what I have done to merit such a degradation."

"Afzul," returned the old man, sternly, "you are addressing your superior officer as well as your father; it is for me to speak and you to listen."

"I may at least ask what my offence has been," grumbled Afzul. "The Sahibs of whom you are always talking do not condemn a man without a trial. I should like to know why you have authorised your servants to pollute my person with their hands."

"'Pollute,' said you?" asked Shamsuddeen. "Can filth be defiled? After you have degraded yourself and dishonoured me as you have done by your excesses and crimes, no punishment can debase you further. The sooner an unknown grave hides your dishonour, the better for both you and me."

"I have done nothing to dishonour you," retorted Afzul; "that is, I may—I confess I have been foolish, and I have often done things that I was sorry for; but not even my father has a right to tack dishonour to my name. If any other had dared to say as much," continued Afzul, laying his hand fiercely upon his thigh, "I should have drowned his lies in his heart's blood!"

"Peace!" said the Subadar; "remember that you are under arrest, and such words are mere blustering insolence. You say you have done nothing to dishonour me. Did you not disgrace my name in my own corps by your insubordination, your debauchery, and your evil example, until the Colonel Sahib was compelled to dismount you? Is it no dishonour that my son should be pointed out as a wine-bibber and a dice-rattler, upon whom the Prophet—God's peace and rest be upon him—has set his ban? Is it no dishonour that my ears should be tortured by tales of your dalliances with infidel wantons? That you should be the boon companion and sworn brother of every blackguard in the valley, whether Hindoo or Mussulman? Oh no! no dishonour, of course! Shamsuddeen Khan Bahadoor, Subadar of Walesby's Horse, salaams to his son for the

lustre which he has cast upon the family reputation;" and the old man raised his palm to his forehead with an ironical reverence.

Stung to the quick by these taunts, conscious that they were only too well deserved, and yet burning with pent-up passion, Afzul could make no reply, and the Subadar went on—

"And now your profligacy has broken the laws of the Government—that Government which was a father to your father, which saved him when a helpless orphan from beggary or from becoming a robber, which promoted him to rank and wealth, and which has put bread in his mouth and in yours from the earliest day of your existence. *Nimak haram!* Faithless to the salt! But that your mother was the purest and best of women, I should take you for the whelp of some Rangree trooper, or the spawn of a Panjabi weaver, rather than for son of mine!"

"But I at least cannot forget that you are my father," replied Afzul, haughtily; "and therefore it is that my tongue is silent, and my hand withheld."

"Withheld, sirrah!" cried Shamsuddeen, passionately; "a fine exercise of moderation indeed, when you know that I could cut you in two with a single blow before you stirred a foot! But I am driven to forget myself by your insolence. I have come to tell you that you are to remain here as a prisoner until the Magistrate Eversley Sahib, to whom I swore to deliver you, dead or alive, arrives in Dhupnagar to try you for

your misdeeds. Thenceforth my old age shall be childless, and when I die my estate shall return back to the Government that gave it; and too little, after all, to atone for the ingratitude which my flesh and blood have shown to its laws."

"Misdeeds!" cried Afzul, looking up with angry astonishment. "And what misdeeds may I have done that the Magistrate Sahib can have any concern with? If I have ever beaten a beggarly Hindoo infidel, have I not always salved his sore with silver? If the Magistrate Sahib is offended with me, I am willing to put myself in his hands at once. With your leave, Subadar Sahib, I shall ride to Bhutpore this very day and answer any accusation that Eversley Sahib may choose to bring against me."

"I said not so," said Shamsuddeen, stiffly. "My orders are that you remain here under arrest until Eversley Sahib require you at my hands."

"And what offences are laid to my charge?" demanded Afzul. "Am I to be condemned in the dark? How can one purge one's self from disease until he has been told the malady? But do your worst, both you and the magistrate; I shield myself behind my own innocence."

"Son Afzul," answered the Subadar, "Ali, the son of Abu Taleb, the successor of the blessed Prophet, hath well said, 'Thy delight in thyself arises from the corruption of thy understanding.' What had an innocent man to do strolling about under the shadow of

night, when all good men had committed their souls to Allah and their bodies to repose? Tell me wherefore it was that, night after night, you have stolen forth like a beast of prey, when nought is stirring except the spirits of the accursed and the sons of crime? Tell me frankly where you have spent your nights, and it may be that I shall yet be able to gain grace for you in the sight of the Magistrate Sahib. But, alas! it is idle to look for good fruit upon a rotten tree."

"And as idle to plead to ears that will not hear," retorted Afzul, "and to a mind that will not believe the truth. Am I a child, that I must ask leave every time I wish to cross the threshold? Nay, then, if I am to be thus oppressed, have your own way; but I warn you that I shall not long submit to such slavery."

"I fear me sore that you will have to submit to a severer bondage before long," said the Subadar, with a sigh; "but as you will not accept my assistance, you must even sit upon your own saddle. I know that you are no coward, however many other vices you may have, and I shall be willing to trust to your parole that you will not leave this room without my consent. Do you agree to this, or shall I be obliged to keep you a close prisoner?"

Instead of returning an immediate answer, Afzul walked round the room, satisfied himself of the strength of the iron bars that guarded the windows, and subjected the door to a critical scrutiny. Apparently he thought that the chances of escape were but slight, for,

after a minute's deliberation, he turned towards his father and said—

"I pledge you my word, then; not that I could not escape if I were so minded, but that you may see I do not fear to face whatever is in store for me. If it pleased you to take my life this minute, I should never raise my hand to bar your dagger."

"I commit you, then, to the Prophet," said the old man, with a trembling voice and tottering limbs. "O Afzul! seek his aid while there is yet time. With all your faults, you are still the light of my old eyes; and if misfortune befall you, I am left in worse than blindness, in worse than death." And the Subadar hurried out of the room to conceal his emotion, just as Afzul, touched to the heart by his father's sorrowful accents, had thrown himself forward upon his knees to seek forgiveness for his waywardness, and to promise that in future he would be a more dutiful son. But his penitence came just one minute too late, and he was addressing himself to the panels of the closed door.

And thus two stubborn hearts marred a golden opportunity of making peace, and stored up bitter trouble for both. The Subadar, bigoted in his notions of discipline, tied up his feelings in red tape, and kept a tight rein upon all the emotions of paternal love. He had not firmness to restrain Afzul as a father, and in the character of an officer he must be both severe and stern. He had, too, a strong suspicion that his son was guilty. When a man had been

guilty of such misconduct in the regiment as Afzul, there was no crime that he was not capable of committing, in the Subadar's way of thinking. Were there not authenticated instances to confirm this opinion? Had not Trumpeter Lall Muhammad, of Walesby's Horse, begun his career of crime by neglecting to oil his stirrup-leathers, and soon after terminated it by breaking into a money-changer's shop near the Cashmere Gate, when the regiment was quartered at Delhi. Then, too, he could remember how Duffadar Goolab Singh, a man from the Bunnoo district, and a brave enough trooper in war-time, had gone on from drinking to insubordination, and from insubordination to *dakaitee*, until he had been at length sentenced to ten years' transportation by the Sessions Judge of Agra. What likelihood was there that Afzul should be any better? Had he not already taken the bit between his teeth; and was it likely that he would pull up before he did himself a mischief? As Shamsuddeen said to himself, theft or even murder was but a light matter for a man that would come upon parade with unclean buttons and rusty spurs, and that had allowed his name to get into the defaulters' book.

Afzul on his side had allowed his pride to rise at the Subadar's sternness, and his haughty spirit could not brook the idea of opening his heart to his father. He had also formed a chivalrous resolution not to betray Radha's fair fame, whatever might be the consequence to himself. He did not doubt that his present diffi-

culty was in some way or other connected with her. Perhaps the plot which he had been planning for her abduction had been discovered, and hence the magistrate's interference. But surely the British Government, that boasted so much of its justice, could not punish a man for a misdeed that was not committed. Upon this point Afzul had his misgivings, and thought it not improbable that he had made himself amenable to punishment. But surely the *intention* of carrying off a young woman could not be such a heavy crime but that a slight fine, or a brief term of imprisonment, would pay the penalty. Yes, it must certainly be so; and all the fuss that his father was making was simply a piece of his usual fanatic martinetism. All these old soldiers were the same; he remembered that Jemadar Mirza Beg of Walesby's used to make more fuss about a man sleeping on sentry than the commander-in-chief would do about losing a battle. Nevertheless he resolved to make his peace with the Subadar, and sat down to await the arrival of Agha, whom he meant to make his ambassador; but it was the Khitmutghar Shaik Kulloo that waited upon him with breakfast, and Afzul found another cause of complaint against his father in the Khyberee being debarred from his presence, for he was quite certain that Agha would not stay long away from him of his own free will.

But Agha had been rigorously excluded from the old *zenana*. When Shamsuddeen left his son, he found the trooper loitering in a corner of the passage. Agha

had concerted a plan which he thought would effect a diversion upon the Subadar's temper. He saluted, as his master approached, endeavoured to put on a bland smile, and said—

"It was on this day of the year, Subadar Sahib, that we fought the battle of Guzerat, and you had so narrow an escape, when Rustum was killed beneath you by the Sikh thirteen-pounder. Is it your pleasure that we make a holiday to celebrate it?"

"The battle of Guzerat!" cried Shamsuddeen, his face lighting up with a glow of pleasure at the recollection; "to be sure it is. What a day that was! You remember, Agha, how we had to sit in our saddles on the artillery flank for three long hours, while our hundred guns were crashing away at Shere Singh's ranks, until Ikram Ali's Afghan Horse charged us. 'Now, my lads!' said Colonel Walesby Sahib, 'don't you think we might say "Threes about" to these gentlemen?' And sure enough they were soon glad to retreat at a quicker pace even than they had come on at."

"And you remember, Sahib, when Rustum fell down dead with you, how Lal Pande, the biggest coward in the regiment, jumped off and offered you his charger, thinking that he might then go to the rear? And what a roar the troopers set up when you said, 'No, no, my friend; you have so accustomed that horse of yours to push into the hottest fighting, that the brute might bring me into awkward company; my servant will get me one'!"

"Ay, and then you galloped across the line of the Sikh fire and caught a riderless charger that was rushing upon our artillery. And a right good horse he was; I rode him until his wind was broken, when General Picquet Sahib reviewed us at Pultunpore."

The train is now sufficiently laid, thought Agha, and if an attack does not succeed now, it never will. "It shall be a holiday in the household then, Subadar Sahib?" he asked aloud.

"Certainly," said the Subadar; "and give a *bakshish* of eight annas to each, and have a lamb killed to bake with their rice. Ah! it was a great day the battle of Guzerat; the Khalsa (Sikh nation) never raised its head again."

"Then we shall haul out 'Pulluk Sahib' to the green before the gate and fire a salute with him? I'll tell Afzul Baba to come and help; he is the only one that understands how to fire him."

But though 'Pulluk Sahib'—a light field-piece, called after the greatest of Indian artillerymen, who has now gone to his rest—was the pride of the Subadar's heart, and though the delight of his old age was to toy with the gun, not even the union of its name with that of his son would effect a diversion in Afzul's favour. The Subadar started, frowned, while Guzerat and all its glories rolled back into the invisible recesses of memory, and turning to Agha, said with a stern voice—

"Afzul is under arrest within the old *zenana;* be careful yourself that your misdeeds meet not a similar

punishment. Shaik Kulloo, the Khitmutghar, will wait upon him; and should any other servant of mine hold communication with the prisoner, it is the day of his dismissal. D'ye hear me, Agha? Am I to be obeyed?"

"Yes, Subadar Sahib," replied Agha, with a dolorous whine, as all his schemes for a reconciliation melted away; "but it is I, and not Afzul, that am to blame. And if in your most excellent justice and boundless mercy you would be pleased to order me for punishment——"

"Silence, fellow!" cried Shamsuddeen, lifting his sheathed sword menacingly. "Are you to lay down to me my duty? Right about face! Mar-rch."

Agha saluted, and went away to the stables in a very sober frame of mind. He was much disconcerted by the failure of his attempt to reinstate Afzul in the Subadar's good graces, and still more by his ignorance of the fault that had thus embittered Shamsuddeen against his son. That the offence was of more than ordinary magnitude, Agha was convinced by his master's visit to the magistrate; but to which particular transgression of Afzul's the commotion was due, Agha could not conjecture. So far as the Khyberee knew, Afzul had done nothing that could bring him into collision with the law, and he was fully in his young master's confidence. It would surely, then, be his whole bearing—his unruly and irregular conduct, and not any special offence—that had got him into trouble; and

when the trooper reflected how much of Afzul's wildness was due to his own example and training, how the young man's turbulent passions had been fostered by his exciting tales of Afghan life and his seditious murmurings at British rule, he began to feel the torments of remorse at work within him. But what availed repentance when the evil was done? The thing to be considered was how he might best aid his young master; and how could he assist him without knowing the point wherein Afzul was at fault?

Neither breakfast, nor the judicial punishment of Bonnoo, the Subadar's farrier, convicted of causing the Cabulee mare to limp by careless shoeing, and sentenced to three dozen strokes on the calves of his legs with a supple bamboo sapling—one dozen and a half being for the actual offence, and the rest for Agha's ill-humour—restored the Khyberee to his usual spirits. Probably for the first time in his life he began to feel something like true repentance for an ill-spent career, and to think that the distress which had come upon him was, after all, but the retribution of a righteous Providence. Impressed with this idea, he went to the stable and got out his old pistol, and set himself diligently to work at scouring the barrel, hoping in that fashion to obtain some gleam of mental guidance. Agha had never applied in vain to this oracle; nor upon this occasion was he doomed to disappointment. After some half-hour's diligent rubbing, the Khyberee's

grasp relaxed, and his exertions slackened, while his face became at the same time lighted up with an expression of sorrowful intelligence.

"*Tobah, tobah!*" (repentance, repentance!) said Agha to himself, with the whine of a begging dervish, as he smote his breast with the palms of his hands; "what a wretched sinner I have been! By Allah! but my oaths, and my wine-drinkings, and my wantonnesses, and my neglect of the precepts of the Prophet—peace and rest be upon him!—and my careful observance to do those very things which he has forbidden, are more than enough to overbalance me upon the sword-edged bridge of Al Sirat, were I as sure-footed as a lizard or a Malabar monkey. My sins, were they all written down, would more than fill a regimental roster. O Allah! there never was wretch so vile as I am, save Duffadar Ibrahim Khan, who deserted to the Sikhs the night before Sobraon, taking with him my silver-mounted pistols. And what chance is there for amendment in this infidel-oppressed land? If I seek my salvation by good works, such as slaying a heathen for the glory of the Faith, lo You! the Sahibs cry out 'murder,' and straightway string me up as if I were a malefactor. And yet I would fain be *safa-karroed* (whitewashed) before Thy face. Not that I would seek to curry favour with Thee for the sake of promotion as some do; the simplest saddle in Paradise will suffice for Agha, the son of Jubbar Khan, and let those have

commissions who best deserve them. But if aught that I could do would avail Afzul, I'd set out on a pilgrimage to-morrow."

The more Agha reflected, the more he was convinced that the occasion demanded some display of religious energy upon his part. The Khyberee had intrusted his spiritual concerns to the care of a holy *moulvie* who resided in Bhutpore, and who generally paid a visit to Walesbyganj about the season when the trooper's pension became payable. In his reverend society Agha would spend a day very devoutly in cursing all infidels and separatists; nor would the holy man disdain to share with the trooper a measure of Rutton Pal's best liquor—sometimes to such an extent as to interfere with the steadiness of his steps on the homeward journey. But it was not of such assistance that Agha now stood in need. Old Sayyid Gulzar's counsels might do well enough when there was nothing serious the matter, and when a formal profession of religion was all that was necessary; but he was not a horse upon which a swollen river might be forded. So Agha resolved to make a pilgrimage on horseback to Ajibganj, in the adjoining district of Lallkor, where was the shrine of a Muhammadan saint, who had wrought great miracles in his lifetime, and still greater ones since his decease. The keeper of the mosque at Ajibganj was, moreover, a countryman of Agha's own, one Peer Muhammad, from the Yusufzye, who might be

expected to understand the workings of an Afghan conscience better than the timorous priests of the Lower Provinces. This praiseworthy resolve, coupled with a mental vow that he would henceforth harass the Subadar's Hindoo tenants to the utmost of his power upon religious principle, quieted the Khyberee's mind in a measure; and with a sigh of relief he rose up and went to restore his pistol to its usual resting-place in the stable.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN PROFUNDIS.

When a shipwrecked sailor who has been dragged exhausted from the breakers, carried senseless to the nearest fisherman's cottage, and there put snugly and warmly to bed by the hospitable kindness of his deliverers—when this poor wretch wakens next morning to find that he has lost all save the bare life, what wonder though at first he be hardly sensible of how much God has spared to him! Such were the feelings of poor Krishna, as from a troubled slumber which had succeeded to the ravings and tossings of a day's delirium, he awoke to a full consciousness of his forlorn condition. He had been miserably deceived; the dearest feelings of his heart had been cruelly trifled with, and, worse than all, he had bartered his faith and his good name for a shadow, and had been cheated in the bargain. It was not from a few hours' derangement, but from months of madness, that Krishna's senses were coming back to him. Was it well that he had ever

awakened? Would he not have owed it to the kindness of the Supreme Brahma if he had been permitted to perish in the depths of his delusion? What had he to live for now? Ay! what? And Krishna, shuddering, shut his eyes, and turned his face to the wall, with a sickness at heart which he prayed might be the sickness of death.

But death came not, and while life remained, Krishna could not help reflecting upon his earthly evils. There was but little that he had left to cling to in the world. The many advantages which nature had conferred upon him had been all perverted, while he had ever made the most of such misfortunes as had fallen to his lot. A melancholy confession; but how many young men may make it? And yet, judged by our standards, Krishna had sinned lightly to be punished so heavily. He had changed his faith. Well, suppose your son should get a "call," and associate himself with the Shakers, or the Sandemanians, or any other of the obscurer forms of Dissent, it would be trying to your feelings as an orthodox Churchman; but you would neither kick him out of doors in this world, nor avail yourself of the Athanasian Creed to consign him to eternal retribution in the next. But as a Hindoo, Krishna was accountable to Hindoo opinion; and in the judgment of that tribunal he had committed an offence—nay, a crime, of the most heinous character. This was the first lapse. Then, when he had entered the ranks of the Theists, he had been

received with honour by the first thinkers among his countrymen, and had been congratulated both by the press and by the public as the future champion of Indian progress—what a grand career had there been spread out before him! With his education and talents, a seat in the Bengal Council would have been an object of ambition not difficult of attainment; and Baboo Krishna Chandra Gossain might have made laws for his countrymen, and taken the private *entrée* at Government House as well as Baboo Bunkum Chunder Chatterjee, before whom the greatest men in Calcutta made obeisance. Or if he had gone to England, might not he have sat at Lord Gotham's table, and shaken hands with the Marquis at the India Office, as well as a shallow-pate like Mr R. C. Roy? And all these golden possibilities he had next flung from him, and for what? For the love of a fair devil, a beautiful dream; a damsel who kept as many hearts in her bosom as there were lovers in her eyes; a temptress as lovely and as wanton as those hired women that were sent to wile away the ascetic of old from his holy retreat to the court of King Dasaratha. And now that he had given up all that was dearest to him, his faith to his God and his fair fame among men, for her sake, she had turned round and laughed at him. A bullying, barbarous, Afghan soldier, whose soul was in a spirit-pot, and who wore his honour in his fists, could command that love with a few vulgar oaths which he had vainly sighed out the finest sentiments of his soul

to obtain. Had a worthier man borne off the prize, he could have endured his sorrow manfully, and even wished his rival "God-speed;" but the bitterest, the most humiliating blow of all was, that he had been supplanted by one who was even beneath his contempt. In such a moment his old belief in the "brotherhood of man" was little likely to have much weight with Krishna; the relationship between him and his successful rival could only be that of a high-caste Brahmin proceeding out of the very mouth of God, and a foul wretch that could not even claim with the lowest Hindoo to be sprung from Brahma's feet, but of whose anomalous origin no one knew anything, and as few cared to know.

As for Radha, all sentiments of affection towards her were effectually dispelled. In some high-strung hearts there is but a semitone between passionate love and bitter hate, and the chord will respond in either note according to the touch of the striker. Of such a nature was Krishna. So long as he thought his passion returned, he would have bowed himself to the greatest indignities that her love chose to lay upon him; but though he would willingly have been her slave, he scorned to be her fool. And now that he was lying broken, and bruised, and bleeding, at the foot of the precipice, whom should he blame but her who had pushed him down? And thus Krishna's present hate became intense in proportion to his past love.

"She is like the *Vishkanya*, the poison-maiden of

the old stories," thought Krishna; "she whom princes had fed upon poison from the hour of her birth, in whom every beauty had been perfected, every charm developed, by the aid of deadly drugs—so that, when sent as a present to a mortal enemy, certain death might ensue from her venomed embrace. Yes, this poison-maiden was designed for my destruction in the just retribution of Providence. But I have escaped her snares—have I, indeed, or has my heart already caught contagion at her lips? It matters not much, for in one way or another I must soon get clear of my earthly troubles."

The sound of a light footstep fell upon his ear, and the shadow of a woman's figure came between him and the fast-failing twilight. Krishna did not raise his head, but instinct told him that Chakwi was watching over his sick-bed. A thrill of pleasure ran through his heart at the thought that there was still some one who cared for him; but only to be succeeded by a pang of remorse when he remembered how her affection had been repaid by coldness and contempt. He would have liked to put forth his hand and draw her to his bosom, and to print a kiss of gratitude upon her lips, but his pride revolted from such meanness. "I scorned her in my weal, and she shall not suffer in my woe," said he to himself; "I can bear my sorrow alone. Poor girl! it was part of my madness to shut my eyes to your affection. Would it had been otherwise—would to God it had been otherwise! But such deeds, such deserts. It's too late now."

As if it ever could be too late to open up the heart that has long hardened itself against the tenders of a pure and disinterested devotion, to acknowledge one's wrong-headedness and errors, and to sue for pardon with a sincere and humble mind! Had Krishna then yielded, a reconciliation would assuredly have taken place, and much that has to be written in the remaining chapters could never have come to pass. But would this have been the best, the happiest issue? You see, we writers become in our way a sort of little providence to our puppets, and may afflict them with evil that good may come, as well as punish them with the still more trying chastisement of a brief prosperity, so that ruin when it does fall upon them shall crush them with an unwonted and terrible force; and surely, when we consider how limited are the combinations of life that come within our conceptions, how transparent and artificial the best plots that we can contrive, we cannot help thinking, with reverence, of the Great Plotter that has written such striking, such unfathomable, such ever-novel mysteries upon the broad page of man's destinies.

So Krishna restrained his feelings, although he was much touched by this fresh proof of Chakwi's fidelity; but he called her to the bedside, and pressed her hand kindly in his own.

"I might have known that you would not be far from me in the hour of my trouble, dear Chakwi," said Krishna, not without a certain bitterness in his

tones ; "I have ill earned such attention at your hands."

Checking a sigh, Chakwi turned away her head to conceal the tears as they started to her eyes, and half endeavoured to withdraw the hand that her husband pressed to his lips. "Am I not your wife?" she said, in a low voice ; "did I not say in front of the burning altar, 'Leaving * my father's house I am come to yours ; I and mine and my life are your property'? You would not have *me* break my word?"

And Chakwi looked down in her husband's face with a gaze of innocent and calm dignity, which, however, instantly gave place to an expression of sorrowful concern as she observed how Krishna winced at the implied reproach.

"Nay," she said, hastily, "but I did not mean to give you pain. I only wished to excuse my presence in your chamber. I know I am not wanted ; I—I am always in the way—and you will never be happy till you have put the torch to my funeral pile. Oh that I were dead!" sobbed forth Chakwi, as she hid her face in her veil.

"Good God! what a wretch I have been!" groaned Krishna ; "spare me, Chakwi—spare me ; I have already more upon my back than I can bear without the self-conviction of your wrongs. If it pleases God to spare me, I may yet atone for the injustice I have done you. I have little else to live for than your love."

* From the marriage ritual.

Chakwi looked up with a wild stare of astonishment. "It is I that am wicked in coming thus to annoy you. You are weak, you are feverish, and must try to sleep. I shall go now and watch in the next room;" and smoothing the sick man's pillow deftly with both her hands, Chakwi stole on tiptoe from the room, but sat herself patiently down outside the door, listening with eager ears that she might fly to his assistance should he want anything.

"I am glad she is gone," thought Krishna, as he threw himself feebly back upon the couch; "I feel chill, as if a devil's shadow had fallen over me, when I look upon the poor neglected little thing. And yet she is an angel, for none but an angel could have forgiven the neglect and scorn with which I have repaid her love all these long years. It is hard to believe that such constancy could exist save in the visions of an ancient poet:—

> "'My lonely, weeping, miserable wife,
> Weeping at early morn, at evening late;
> Where hast thou seen a nymph so soft of mould,
> So tender, loving, and disconsolate?
> Sure the sad lady's spirit dwelt of old
> In some frail lotus-flower that shrank from rain and cold.'" *

The stately roll of the Sanscrit *slokas*, coupled with the weak and excited condition of Krishna's mind, filled his eyes with tears, and caused his nether lip to

* From Principal Griffiths', of Benares, spirited translations of the 'Messenger Cloud.' The reader will please to understand that Krishna quoted the original language of Kalidasa.

shake. Raising himself upon his elbow, to see that there were no witnesses of his effeminacy, he noticed that two newspapers had been placed upon the little table that held the few necessaries of his toilet.

"What! are these English papers?" said he, clearing his eyes. "There were none there before. I wonder how they came here. Could Chakwi have brought them? Ah! it's some of Romesh Chunder Roy's work. I wish I could get at them;" and reaching forth his arm, he endeavoured to get at the table, but in a second Chakwi had sprung in and placed the journals in his hand.

"They were brought hither by that English-like Baboo," she said, apologetically; "but I feared that you were not fit to read them; and besides, I feared that—that there might be some evil to you in a paper coming from that unclean and wicked flesh-eater."

"Silly one!" said Krishna, with a faint smile; "do you believe in such nonsense? But you must go to your own room; I am very comfortable, and shall want for nothing more. Go now, and please your husband," and holding up his face, he pressed a kiss upon the smooth, round cheek, and gently pushed her away from him.

Chakwi's face flushed, as if Krishna's lips had magnetised all the blood in her body towards it, and her heart beat violently when she paused breathlessly outside the room. "He kissed me, and yet sent me away. He cares not to have me with him. But I shall do his

bidding; Chakwi is not going to force her love even upon her husband. And besides, I must go to that dreadful place to-night. How can I ever get courage to carry me so far through the darkness? But what is there that I would not dare to win his love;" and Chakwi went noiselessly away to her own room, dreading, in her bashfulness, lest any even of the house domestics should know that she had been in her husband's apartment.

Meanwhile we must return to Krishna. A candle, which Chakwi had placed in a niche at the head of his bed, enabled him to see that the journals were the two last issues of the 'Bengalee Baboo,' the organ of orthodox Hindooism, and the 'Cossitollah Reflector,' which shadowed forth the views of the reforming Theists. Giving the preference to the 'Baboo,' he opened and read that Rajah Siva Jagganath Bahadur had given a great *natch*, at which there had been present Sir Dackle Duftur, the Hon'ble Pekin Prattle, the mercantile member of council, Mr Snipper, from the Bengal Secretariat, and other *élite* of Calcutta society, who had expressed their sense of the Rajah's hospitality in the most flattering terms; that Baboo Mohendro Jath Bose was the foremost man in Calcutta, whether for religion, liberality, public spirit, or private character; and that words were wanting the 'Baboo' to characterise in sufficiently reprobative language those vile miscreants who had asserted in a contemporary—which the 'Baboo' would not pollute his pages by

designating—that the Mæcenas of Kuli Bazaar had been seen to reel out of Spence's Hotel in a state of too evident intoxication, when every one with the slightest pretension to a knowledge of good society was aware of the worthy gentleman's constant liability to vertigo and spasms, the penalty of his arduous labours for the good of his ungrateful countrymen; that the Reverend Lamentations Splasher, Baptist missionary at Dipteepûl, had, upon the undoubted authority of a valued native correspondent, made a criminal attempt upon the honour of an amiable widow lady, aged ninety-five next Jaagadadhatri festival, relict of the late lamented Rammohun Bose of that station, and that all the Padree Sahibs of the district were employing bribes and threats to hush up the business; that the Editor of the 'Padrepore Monitor' was a fiend and a villain and a brutal Anglo-Saxon oppressor for daring to insinuate that Kali Dass Bhur had been justly convicted of forgery, when to the veriest fool it was clearly apparent that Mr Justice Tremor, who had summed up against the prisoner, was notoriously biassed, and that the jury, who had brought in a verdict of guilty, was bribed to a man; that Mr Romesh Chunder Roy, the talented author of 'Champak Leaves,' was by far the ablest barrister in the High Court, and that nothing but the petty jealousy of an alien administration, which always did its best to stifle native genius, kept him from promotion, while such men as Bob Bullie and Phelim

Doyle were made Solicitor-General and Sitting Counsel to the Bengal Government; and many other items of similar interest. But on turning over the first page his eye became riveted to a particular paragraph which occupied a prominent place among the editorial effusions, and which he now devoured with breathless anxiety. It ran thus:—

"RECANTATION OF A BRAHMIST PERVERT.—It will be a matter of congratulation to our many readers when we inform them that the promising young gentleman, Baboo Krishna Chandra Gossain, son of the venerable custodian of the holy Linga of Dhupnagar, to whose temporary adhesion to Theism the 'Cossitollah Reflector' and its meddling patrons sometime ago gave such an ill-advised publicity, has been happily reconciled to the faith of his fathers. A mind so acute and many-sided as that of Baboo Krishna Chandra Gossain could not possibly remain satisfied with the narrow dogmas of our so-called reformers, which are as specious as they are delusive; nor could a high-souled youth, brought up in the best Brahmin society, long tolerate the assumptions of a clique which, while professing to despise caste, seeks, on the sole ground of religious superiority, to set itself above all the constituted castes of the country. We admire the high moral courage which has enabled Krishna Baboo to frankly acknowledge his error, and we commend his example to other young men who, having found out their mistake, still hesitate, through fear of oppro-

brium, to retrace their steps. We may anticipate that the 'Cossitollah Reflector' will meet this statement with its usual denial, but we derive our information from a gentleman now on the spot, who is certainly no enemy to the Theistic cause. We may also add that Baboo Krishna Chandra Gossain is about to contract a matrimonial engagement with a young lady of great beauty and accomplishments belonging to a highly connected and most orthodox family in his native village."

When he had glanced over this paragraph, Krishna tore open the 'Reflector,' which he knew would express the Theistic opinion of his tergiversations, and lo! the first article on the first page was devoted to a scathing attack upon himself. The 'Reflector' had no intention of denying the truth of the announcement contained in the last issue of the 'Bengalee Baboo,' and heartily congratulated its contemporary upon the accession of Baboo Krishna Chandra Gossain to the Orthodox party. The editor then went on to analyse the whole of Krishna's mental and moral qualities, making the former out to be of the most superficial character, and the latter not any better than they ought be. From this he glanced at the benighted condition of Dhupnagar, denouncing it as a hotbed of ignorance, superstition, and crime, and declaring that were Mr Muffington Prig magistrate of the Gungaputra district but for a single day, such a vile cesspool would no longer disfigure the map of

Bengal. Then, after disposing of Ramanath as a hoary-headed idol-monger, who had bought his son's honour for licence to practice libertinism, and stigmatising the Lahories as panderers to the worst passions of humanity, the writer turned back to give Krishna the *coup de grâce:* "Let no one presume to say that the cause of Theism will suffer from Krishna Baboo's defection. It is rather a positive gain. We know, and will dare to measure our strength with, our open opponents; but what defence have we against weakness and half-heartedness in our own ranks? We agree with our contemporary in recommending Krishna Baboo's example to all those among us—if any such there be —who entertain misgivings as to the creed they have adopted. Better far that they slunk back at once into the slavery of caste—what matter though their names become like that of Krishna Chandra Gossain, a hissing and a reproach wherever the eternal truth is proclaimed?—than that they remained among us to spread doubt and chill the minds of earnest believers with their formalism and indifference. We take our leave of Krishna Baboo with the prayer that the rejection of the truth may never be laid to his charge in a future state, and with the hope that he may suffer no direr punishment than the reproaches of his own conscience. We have heard that Krishna Chandra indulged in dreams of making a name for himself, and we suppose his ambition has now been gratified, for his name will henceforth stand as a synonym for per-

fidy and baseness wherever there are Hindoos that struggle sincerely and honestly for the revival of their degraded countrymen."

"Yet deeper in the mire," said Krishna, as he fell back on his pillow with a groan. "Oh, God! what is there yet to come? Hurl Thy remaining bolts in merciful quickness, and keep me not longer in torture. This is then the end of all my dreams of future greatness—irretrievable disgrace and obloquy, and the scorn of her whom I most loved. But why should I blame her faithlessness when I myself have been a traitor —a traitor to God and religion. My punishment is but too just, and its justness is the heaviest part of it."

Since his abjuration of Brahmism, Krishna had given up his devotions, except the repetition of an occasional formula from the Shastras, to humour his father, which in his mouth had no meaning at all. Now he felt in his heart an intense need of prayer, a desire to pour out all his troubles and doubts and difficulties before the Great Unseen One, whose cords he had cast from him, and whose worship and glory he had degraded to the service of idols made by men's hands. But how could he, a rebel, a sworn foe, approach the Eternal? Submission could only lead to his own destruction, and his pride rose at the idea of humbling himself to Him whom he had denied—for still does the *audax Japeti genus* walk beneath heaven with a proud head and a haughty heart, brav-

ing even the thunderbolts of an angry Jove. But in dire distress the heart *will* have a vent, and neither Brahma, Vishnu, nor Siva, the Linga of Dhupnagar nor the Temple of Tarakeshwar, would suffice for Krishna at that moment. At length he gave up his mind to God, and when he had done so, the rest was easy. There was no trace of pride then, no shadow of self-sufficiency, no attempt at extenuation nor endeavour to palliate, but rather a seeking for the lowest depths of humiliation, a grovelling in the uncleanest mire that his soul could find to prostrate itself in. He had erred, but he could not be satisfied unless he made himself out to be a greater sinner than he really had been. And this abasement did him good. He felt as if he clung a suppliant to the garments of God, and no longer stood afar as an alien. His mind calmed down, and hope and peace began to shine upon his soul through the breaking storm-clouds of passion. He might yet win the favour of God—he might yet atone for his past errors,—not by allying himself to these uncharitable sophists of the Calcutta debating clubs, but by loving God and helping his fellows. Here, after all, was something to live for, and Krishna felt that he would live and not die.

When evening service was over in the temple, Ramanath came slipping barefooted into his son's room to see if the fever had abated. He found Krishna calm and self-possessed. The priest recommended him to keep the window shut, to get an extra

coverlet put upon his bed, and to drink a posset of *nim* leaves, which old Bechoo would prepare for him, and was moving away to his bed when Krishna stopped him, and begged to be permitted to speak upon a matter of importance. Ramanath, fearing that some new difficulty might have arisen, would fain have postponed the interview upon the ground that Krishna was too weak to talk, and that the hour was late; but when he saw that his son was obstinate, the good priest sat down upon the bed with a sigh, and with serious misgivings as to the soundness of his night's sleep. But evil as were his anticipations, he was not prepared for the announcement that Krishna was about to make —namely, that he had abandoned all intentions of marrying Kristo Baboo's daughter, and that the negotiations between the families must be at once broken off.

"Sacred Siva! break off the marriage?" cried Ramanath, jumping from the bed in amazement and shading his eyes with his hands that he might the better see Krishna's face. "But it is impossible; cannot be done. Such a thing was never heard of in Dhupnagar before. Why, I would not say such a thing to Bejoy, the *ghatak*, for five score rupees."

"If you will not, I must, then, father," answered Krishna, firmly; "I would not wed with Radha Lahory for all the gold upon Mount Someru. Press me not, father, for my mind is made up."

"God of the azure neck! (Siva)—and but yesterday

he was sighing for her like a sal-tree in a gale of wind!" ejaculated poor Ramanath, with upturned eyes. "A pestilence upon all young fools that know not their own minds. And what have you against the girl, son Krishna, that has made you change thus suddenly?"

"I have nothing against her. I make no complaint; but she loves me not—is not that enough?"

"Love you? why, she has had no chance. How can you know whether she loves you or not? She did not say so when you went to see her, did she? for you came back well enough pleased then. You have got some of your silly English notions into your head again. However, if you will make a fool of yourself, you are not going to make a world's wonder of me likewise. Break off the marriage, in the gods' names, yourself, but don't make the townsmen say that Ramanath Gossain went back from his word. And hearken, son Krishna! don't let any of your heretical notions get hold of you again, else you might find if aught befell me that you would have nothing left but the beggar's dish to lick. I have done my duty to the country and to my religion; and Gangooly, the headman, who has my testament, will see it carried out. I wish I had wrung your neck about before I sent you to that thrice-cursed English college in Calcutta," ejaculated Ramanath to himself as he left the room. "May both pundits and students be cast from the highest height in heaven to the lowest

gulf in hell, and be roasted there with their own books until the end of time, for meddlesome, shallow-pated mischief-makers that they are!"

With a devout prayer that the learned members of the Presidency College may escape such a fate, I close this chapter.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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